"Keeping the Sources pure": The Making of George Mackay Brown

A comparative study of Brown's work with special reference to his reception of Edwin Muir, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Mann.

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Abstract of Thesis

In this study I attempt to draw attention to the complexities behind the "making" of George Mackay Brown. I re-address the question of Brown's literary rating by contextualising his work within the broader framework of twentieth-century British and European literary practices and traditions of thought. Whilst duly acknowledging the significance of Brown's Orcadian background, this study is based on the perception that it is precisely the creative tension between Orkney (as a source of potent symbols) and other literary and extra-literary influences from further afield that gives Brown's work its distinctive profile. Rather than following the question of what Brown did for Orkney and for Orcadian or Scottish literature and literary identity, I examine what Scottish, English and European writing and writers did for Brown and how they helped to define his aesthetic and spiritual stance. Accordingly, I set his work, for contrast and comparison among the works of writers and poets who profoundly influenced him.

After establishing the background to Brown-scholarship in chapter one, clarifying the reception of Brown in Britain as well as discussing factors that affected the evaluation of his work, I proceed in chapter two with a consideration of Brown's and Muir's literary and personal relationship. Chapter three establishes a case of affinity and influence between Hopkins and Brown. Separated chronologically, the two poets are yet remarkably contemporaneous in their spiritual vision and their approach to poetry and the word. Hopkins provided a stimulus for Brown to look for a system that would allow him to exercise and deploy the latent power and the unused resources in the English language. Moreover, their shared religious beliefs are further connected to their prophetic and bardic conception of the poetic office and the poetic techniques they use. Having assimilated the aesthetic implications of Inscape Brown began to explore more deeply what interested him: "states of mind, inscapes interest me more than people or places." Hopkins made a profound impression on Brown; he underlined his own views about the potential and sacramental power of the word and must be considered as a crucial stimulus, inspiring Brown to experiment with ways of expression that could bring together the mythic and the aesthetic by means of the religious. In chapter four I seek to elucidate Brown's affinity with Thomas Mann, an example of European writing. Brown read widely in Mann and revered him to the end of his life. Mann's works not only contain many situations with which Brown could identify but Brown's own thoughts often reflect those of Mann. In both his published and unpublished comments he

leaves no doubt as to his enduring fascination with Mann's concerns and his narrative methods.

In spite of their differences the four writers and poets analyse in their own ways remarkably similar cultural and spiritual phenomena. Muir travelled far back into the racial memory of the tribe where he discovered an archetypal past that he believed informed life in the present. Hopkins aimed for a revival of basic religious values and the recovery of the sacramental power of the word. Thomas Mann held that man must discover and put into practice a "new humanism" which embraces both the mythic-archetypal structure of the unconscious and man's individual consciousness. Thus, what links all of them is their shared attempt to "get back to the roots and sources". All four explored man's condition; they probed the ways individuals and society as a whole gain a better understanding of and a more meaningful relationship with their pasts. All four believed in related concepts concerning a polar dualism underlying all art and life; yet, they also believed in a "return" or "homecoming" to some source or centre.

I hereby certify that this thesis is the product of my own unaided work and that all sources have been duly acknowledged.

(Edinburgh, 16 July, 1999)

(Sabine Schmid)

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List of Abbreviations

1. Frequently quoted works by George Mackay Brown:

A	*Andrina and Other Stories*
BOT	*Beside the Ocean of Time*
FaL	*Following a Lark*
FwP	*Fishermen with Ploughs*
LaF	*Loaves and Fishes*
M	*Magnus*
OT	*An Orkney Tapestry*
SP	*Selected Poems 1954-1992*
TK	*A Time to Keep and Other Stories*
V	*Vinland*
WoA	*The Wreck of the Archangel*

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There used to be a time – not so long ago – when people who wrote for a living threw away all their rough jottings and early shapings, and even the fair copy that is produced with so much sweat and labour. Nothing mattered in the end but the finished article – the ordered print on the page, with its imaginings and rhapsodies or mere information. All that has changed in recent years. A writer throws away nothing – not the least fragment of a whim that he jots down on a match-box in the middle of the street. [...] Today, it seems there is a market for anything [...]. Among other things they want the scrawls of writers, however fragmentary, messy, and incomprehensible. Why? In order possibly that some student in the year 2000, avid for a PhD. might sieve through all those blots and scratchings in order to find out the way a certain person's mind worked in the 1970s. Well, good luck to the young scholars, and deepest sympathy. [...] Whatever the reason, the little scraps of paper with a few words on them [...] that I used to light the fire with [...] are now carefully labelled and put away into a drawer, until the arrival of the manuscript dealer. There is many a way to turn an honest shilling nowadays.

George Mackay Brown

(Letters from Hamnavoe, MS, 1973)

Chapter I
Introduction

1. Brown's reception in Britain

Over the past decade the critical evaluation of the work of Orcadian poet, novelist and short-story writer George Mackay Brown has undergone a number of transformations. Brown's literary career began in 1952 when, on Edwin Muir's recommendation, he sent his poem "The Exile" to the *New Statesman.* After the publication of his first collection of poetry, *The Storm and Other Poems* (1954) and particularly after the first nation-wide publication of his volume of poetry, *Loaves and Fishes* (1959), Brown began to make his mark as a poet. The publication of *The Year of the Whale* (1965) consolidated his reputation and the appearance of his first book of short stories, *A Calendar of Love* (1967), won him a new position as an eminent prose stylist. Alan Bold remarked that Brown's prose "was an even sharper instrument than his verse" and he proclaimed him as "Scotland's finest living writer of imaginative prose".[1] In 1969, the publication of *A Time to Keep* brought Brown a Scottish Arts Council Literature prize and, for the title story, a Katherine Mansfield Menton short-story prize. After the publication of *An Orkney Tapestry* in 1969 – the poet's account and celebration of Orkney history, legend and folklore – Brown was considered to be one of Scotland's most gifted poets. *The Spectator* celebrated him as one of the foremost Scottish writers:

> George Mackay Brown is a portent. No one else writes like this or has this feeling for language. No one else stands out against the gravel background of modern literature with forms and colours like those he has taken [...]. His is an innate talent: as true as that of Yeats.[2]

Newspapers such as *The Times* acknowledged Brown's writing as "work as widely known and respected throughout the English speaking world as the writings of Edwin Muir and Eric Linklater".[3] In the early 1970s the publication of Brown's first novel *Greenvoe* (1970), which shows his concern for the small and remote Orcadian community faced with the threats and blighting effects of scientific and technological progress (embodied in the government project "Black Star"), struck a strong chord among British, and particularly, Scottish readers who had been sensitised to political and economic change since the first wave of SNP success in the 1960s and North-Sea-Oil-related developments in the early 1970s. Brown's foreshadowing of the possible devastating impact of the oil industry on humanity and the Northern Isles in

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[1] See Alan Bold, *George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh 1978), p. 50.
[2] See George Mackay Brown (GMB), *An Orkney Tapestry* (London 1973, 1969), p. i.: reviews.
[3] See *Times Educational Supplement (TES)*, 16/5/1975.

particular coincided with the heated debate that was sparked off by the coming of North Sea Oil and related discussions about the future of the country as well as the increased attention given to Orkney and Shetland in these years. In 1975, *The Times* commented that the novel had prophetic qualities; it was suggested that, although what Brown foresaw was an island village torn apart by the mysterious operation "Black Star" rather than by oil tankers, the effect was much the same.[4]

Brown's works were hailed by some of the foremost contemporary poets such as Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes and by one of his most influential mentors and early supporters, Edwin Muir. Despite his reluctance to follow literary fashion or join the poetry-reading scenes and circuits in Edinburgh, Glasgow and London, Brown yet enjoyed over the years a status as one of the most popular and prominent modern writers in Britain, and on the Scottish scene in particular. Public acclaim came to him in the form of many literary awards and prizes: his last novel, *Beside the Ocean of Time* was nominated for the Booker-prize in 1994 and won the Saltire Award. At the same time however, Brown was criticised for being too insular and narrow in his outlook. After the publication of *Greenvoe* many Scottish reviewers and critics grew increasingly impatient with his subsequent work whose main theme and preoccupation had been recognised as being Orcadian life, history, folklore and legends. Despite contemporary interest in the social and cultural values of "regional" literatures and the acknowledgement of "place" as an aesthetic category, Brown's use of Orkney as a setting and a locale came to be regarded as a potential limitation of his artistic talents. Critics also felt that, after the publication of *Greenvoe*, he had turned his back on the more urgent implications of change.[5] Earlier, in the late 1960s, Brown had been criticised for being too "local", writing about Orkney all the time. Stuart Conn's warning that Brown ought to be careful not to "become too local and allow himself to be thought of as the 'The Orkney poet'", is symptomatic.[6] Frequently, Brown's personal and artistic relationship with his native islands, and the reputation he had for being "the Orkney bard" or "the voice of Orkney", led to the belief that his writing was characterised by a certain narrowness of field. Douglas Gifford, for instance, tentatively suggested that Brown's case "is the sad one of a truly great writer who has chosen to live in a room with only one view from its single window".[7] On various other occasions, Brown's work was labelled as being slightly

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] See Stuart Conn, "Poets of the Sixties – II: George Mackay Brown", in *Lines Review* 22 (Winter 1966), p.17.
[7] See Douglas Gifford, "Scottish Fiction since 1945", in Norman Wilson (ed.), *Scottish Writing and Writers* (Edinburgh 1977), p. 15.

old-fashioned, "far-away" and "otherworldly".[8] Moreover, Roderick Watson maintains in *The Literature of Scotland* that Brown's "mythic and fatalistic habit of mind [cannot] always do justice to the tensions and complexities inherent in the contemporary world".[9] Further criticism was directed at Brown's perceived immersion in Catholicism. It was argued that his religious outlook and didacticism led to a restricting of his literary ability. Gifford claimed that Brown was compelled by his Catholicism to "a predictable denouement and [...] an artless obviousness and repetitiveness of situation and image".[10]

Such assessments would seem to subscribe to the view that a writer has to revolutionise the literary scene in some ideological, stylistic or linguistic way in order to be deemed "modern" enough for the tastes of a critical post-modern society that never tires of deconstructing itself. Brown never claimed that his work attended to the sceptical and dissective 21st-century *Zeitgeist* in the same fashion as the mainstream of contemporary Scottish or British writing did. This further complicated the process of placing his work or fitting it into the established literary camps. When his novel *Beside the Ocean of Time* (1994) was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1994, "gentle poet" Brown, whose nomination had come as a surprise to many, seemed to be slightly out of place amongst the likes of "gritty" writers James Kelman and Alan Hollinghurst. At least so it seemed to the reading public in England, as Douglas Gifford tellingly puts it when he observes that Brown appeared to many in the south as an "unknown foreigner".[11] Possibly Brown's deliberate reluctance to follow literary fashion or theory and his hesitation to join the poetry-reading scenes and circuits in Glasgow, Edinburgh and London may have contributed to the sometimes rather muted response to his work and to his ambiguous literary position. Moreover, Brown's secluded Orkney-based life and his modest, "unarty" behaviour, which did not involve much travelling, giving interviews or appearing before cameras and on stage, no doubt provided sufficient reason for critical neglect. It also made reviewers and even his publishers feel that his attitude was unhelpful at times.[12] The extent to which Brown's relative marginalisation may also be naturally linked to Orkney's geographic position, encouraging ambiguous reactions to the peripheral Other, would require further investigation.

However, irrespective of the reasons, the ambivalent background to Brown's reception, the relative lack of scholarly attention to his work and the great disparity in

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[8] See Tom Lappin, "The Booker Breakdown", in *The Scotsman*, 7/9/1994.
[9] See Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1984), p. 435.
[10] See D. Gifford, "Scottish Fiction since 1945", p.15;
[11] See D. Gifford, "George Mackay Brown – An Appreciation", in *The Scotsman*, 15/4/1996.
[12] See Peter Gilman, "A cold northern light", in *The Sunday Times*, 3/9/1989.

critical opinion as to his artistic achievement certainly merit closer examination. At any rate, the fact that his literary standing is still inconclusive raises fundamental questions as to his place in a Scottish and wider British and European literary context.

2. Brown-Scholarship

While substantial work has been produced in such areas as the specifically Orcadian or Scandinavian background to Brown's life and work, much is still left to be said about his indebtedness to other British sources and influences and his idiosyncratic way of absorbing European literature and transforming these stimuli in his art. To date, the bulk of Brown-criticism exists in form of book reviews, interviews, newspaper-articles and short essays. The first comprehensive attempt to deal critically with Brown's work was made by Alan Bold in 1978.[13] Bold acknowledges Brown's achievement as a poet, novelist, dramatist and storyteller and touches on major topics and themes which run through his work. However, an updated analysis of Brown's literary achievement from the late 1970s onwards is yet to be written. Although Bold points out the influence of such writers as Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht on Brown, he merely mentions their names amongst other writers who have had an effect on Brown.[14] Consequently nothing is said about the possible nature of such influences or the reasons why Brown was drawn to their work. The most recent and comprehensive study so far is Berthold Schoene's doctoral thesis that deals with narrative identity in the prose work of Brown.[15] Schoene argues that all of Brown's writings are marked by his search for a distinct Orcadian identity and his attempts to come as close as possible to an apt description of "Orcadianness". By investigating Brown's ways of creating an Orkney community-myth in his prose writings, Schoene attempts to disclose correlations between the prose writings of Brown and a distinct Orcadian identity. The value of Schoene's thesis consists in throwing light on the ways in which Brown's personal vision of Orkney could have contributed to the construction and maintenance of a late twentieth-century Orcadian identity. He analyses the ways in which Brown made his Orkney background part of his vision and how this, in turn, influenced his community's self-image. A different approach is taken by Rowena Murray in her unpublished doctoral thesis "Style as Voice. A Reappraisal of George Mackay Brown's Prose".[16] Murray holds that by focusing on themes and settings rather than on style and technique in Brown's writing, critics have ignored his innovations in

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[13] See Alan Bold, *George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh 1978), which is so far the only full-length treatment of Brown's life and work.

[14] Ibid.: "George Mackay Brown has been stylistically influenced by several writers, Thomas Mann, E. M. Forster, Jorge Luis Borges, Brecht, Eliot, Hopkins, Yeats, Dylan Thomas. More immediate than the impact of those writers has been the literature of Orkney" (p. 12).

[15] Berthold Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia. Narrative Identity in the Prose Work of George Mackay Brown* (Frankfurt a. Main 1994).

[16] Rowena Murray, "Style as Voice. A Reappraisal of George Mackay Brown's Prose" (Ph.D. Pennsylvania State University 1986).

prose style. She sets out to analyse Brown's stylistic versatility and his use of style as "voice". In her analysis of *Greenvoe* (1971), *Magnus* (1972) and *Time in a Red Coat* (1984) she examines how the interaction of styles expresses the different perceived realities that constitute Brown's novels. By focusing on his technical innovations and experiments Murray attempts a stylistic evaluation of his work in the light of contemporary critical theory and narrative technique. Other critical studies have taken the more spiritual and religious aspects of Brown's work into account. John McGrath for instance, examines Brown's work and beliefs in the light of his background as an Orcadian and a convert to Catholicism. As its main thread his M.Litt. thesis traces the religious themes of Brown's work and attempts to demonstrate in what ways they mirror his religious beliefs.[17] David Annwn's thesis compares Brown with Geoffrey Hill and Seamus Heaney in their common interest in the mythical and historical past. He analyses the three poets' concept of history, myth and legend, and traces their approach back to Eliot's notion of the contemporaneity of history and "the present moment of the past".[18] Following a different approach, Helen Welham finds in Brown's writing for children a strong sense of place and landscape. This, she claims, deeply influenced his choice of story, theme and setting and has made him an important literary example of Scottish culture and the "Scottish heritage".[19] Referring to Brown's *Greenvoe* in his publication *Fool's Gold. The Story of North Sea Oil* (1994), Christopher Harvie suggests that it was North Sea Oil and environmentalist as well as socio-political concerns that fired Brown's imagination as well as that of many other literary Scots.[20] Other studies on Brown's work include Charlene Bao's M.Litt. thesis on "Seductive Mannerism in the Work of George Mackay Brown" in which she discusses Brown's fiction in terms of narrative technique, style, popularity and gender issues while drawing heavily on Jean Baudrillard's cultural theories and his concept of "Seduction" and "Hyperrealism".[21]

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[17] See John McGrath, "The Orkney Tapestry of George Mackay Brown" (M.Litt. University of Strathclyde 1981).

[18] See David Annwn, *Inhabited Voices: Myth and History in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill, Seamus Heaney and George Mackay Brown* (Somerset 1984), especially pp. 155-212. To date his is the only doctoral thesis that deals with aspects of Brown's poetry.

[19] See Helen Welham, "A Sense of Place: Some Aspects of Scottish Fiction for children seen in the writing of Mollie Hunter, Eileen Dunlop and George Mackay Brown" (M.Litt. University of Stirling 1989), pp. 254 and 314.

[20] See Christopher Harvie, "Boring Issue which spawned an arts boom", in *The Scotsman*, 18/9/1994; also C. Harvie, *Fool's Gold. The Story of North Sea Oil* (London 1994).

[21] See Charlene Bao, "Seductive Mannerism in the Work of George Mackay Brown" (M.Litt. University of Edinburgh 1994). For a biographic and bibliographic survey see N. A. Burnet, "George Mackay Brown. The first fourty years 1921-1961" (M.Litt. Cambridge University 1992); and Osama Yamada, H. Spear, D. S. Robb, *The Contribution to Literature of Orcadian Writer George Mackay Brown: An Introduction and a Bibliography*, Studies in British Literature 16 (Lewiston et al. 1991).

Taking into account further essays, articles and reviews on aspects of Brown's work, the overall impression is that most of these deal with the Orcadian or Scandinavian heritage which is identified as Brown's main inspiration.[22] Thus, although much valuable work has been produced by writers, scholars and students, a more wide-ranging analysis of Brown's place in the context of modern British and European writing is still needed

[22] See R. Murray "The influence of Norse literature on the twentieth-century writer George Mackay Brown", in Manfred Mahlzahn (ed.), *Aspects of identity: the contemporary Scottish novel (1978-1981) as national self-expression*, Scottish Studies 2 (Frankfurt a. Main 1984), pp. 547-557.

[23] This point is further elaborated by Alan MacGillivray in "George Mackay Brown's *Greenvoe*", in *Scotnotes* 6 (Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Aberdeen 1989), p. 1.

3. Brown's Orkney background: Orkney as the Other?

Something that has tended to have a negative effect on the evaluation of Brown's literary standing is the perception of his Orcadian background as potentially limiting. The geographic location and representation of Scotland's north and the Northern Isles has invited many people to regard such remote places and geographic margins as cultural peripheries whose marginal ranking classifies them as inferior. More clearly, marginal and remote places such as Shetland and Orkney, located at the opposite pole to the cultural and industrial centres of Britain and Europe have encouraged ambiguous reactions to the peripheral Other. While they tend to evoke nostalgia and fascination, spurring the imagination of travellers, tourists, and many of Brown's urban readers, they are also liable to be stigmatised, and are frequently regarded as a cultural and industrial backwater. One of the factors supporting this process is that the islands form a distinctive region on their own both within Scotland and within the United Kingdom. Those areas of Scotland lying closest to Orkney (Caithness to the south and the Shetland Islands to the north) are in many ways so different in history, culture, language and way of life for Orkney to have been regarded for the last two centuries as having a separate identity, signified by the recognition given to Orkney in the reorganisation of local government in the 1970s and subsequently by its own island council.[23] Over the centuries the islands' geographic remoteness as well as their historical links with Norway and the Scandinavian heritage in general has contributed significantly to their difference and perceived uniqueness.[24] In his introduction to *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (1975) Ernest Marwick – Orkney scholar and for many years editor of the weekly newspaper *The Orcadian* – confirms that the northern isles came only gradually into history out of a haze of romantic tradition, and he concludes that "Orkney and Shetland are, even today, two of the least known archipelagos in the United Kingdom".[25] The 1950s and '60s, however, were important years for Orkney. They were characterised by an awareness

[24] Long before any large-scale promotion of Orkney and Shetland as a destination for travellers in Scotland began to take shape in the late nineteenth century, and long before the twentieth-century tourist industry could make use of the now familiar images and taken-for-granted representations of Scotland and her islands, the image of Scotland's northern parts was actively shaped and re-shaped in a process that dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Literature and travel-writing have a special relevance for the study of the changing representation of the North as well as the formation of a particular place-image of Orkney. For an account of how complex political, historical, cultural and sociological mechanisms have influenced the process of perceiving and representing Scotland and Orkney and how specific place-images have been created, see J. R. & M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland. Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750* (Hants/England and Vermont 1995); also Katherine Jean Haldane, *Imagining Scotland: Tourist Images of Scotland, 1770-1914.* (Ph.D. University of Virginia 1990).

[25] See E. W. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (London 1975), pp. 12 and 13.

among Orcadians of their uniqueness. Attempts were made to promote Orcadian otherness and originality as something that would contribute to a specifically Orcadian identity and a more self-conscious image of Orkney's place in a politically and culturally centralised Britain. Among those who helped to create an image of Orkney as a rather different and "un-Scottish" place was the Orcadian Stanley Cursiter. He argued that, although geographically remote, to Orcadians Orkney does not seem marginal or insignificant at all. In his article "Living in Scotland" (1955) he insists on Orkney's centrality and her independent culture:

> The islands have a complete unity within themselves. Kirkwall is definitely a local capital, [...] The various villages are each nodal points or centres in their own right. Each island is a community [...] far more distinct than, for instance, the Parliamentary Divisions of a great city [...]. There is the self-contained intercommunication between the islands, our local sea routes. The Kirkwall-Stromness bus is, to us, just as important as the Edinburgh-Glasgow train. [...] The "Sooth" has as little significance for us as the Continent of Europe has for the British Isles. Local government circles may be aware of the controlling hand of St. Andrew's House, but for the islanders as a whole it might as well be situated on the moon.[26]

Ernest Marwick too had a deep interest in all aspects of Orkney history, literature and culture and was one of the more vociferous advocates of Orkney's difference. Rather than seeing Orkney as a peripheral "region" or parish of Scotland he regarded the islands as "a bridge between Scotland and Norway":[27]

> The islands of Orkney [...] always afford the visitor some slight surprise, for they do not seem to fit, either topographically or sociologically, into the picture. [...] Then there are the Orcadians themselves. These, despite a strong admixture of Scots, remain fundamentally un-Scottish. Their speech is soft, with uncommon idioms and attractive cadences. [...] They still look across the sea to Norway with spiritual nostalgia, they still dwell with pride on the exploits of their Viking forebears.[28]

And F. T. Wainwright summed up the situation of Orkney thus:

> The islands of Orkney and Shetland are the northernmost islands of Britain. Attractive and full of romance to those who know them, they are wild, windswept and forbidding in the imagination of those who have never wandered in the far north. [...] the Northern Isles were the *terrae incognitae* of the north, and even to-day an air of mystery clings to their shores. This is due in part to their remoteness and comparative inaccessibility. Kirkwall in Orkney, though only a few miles away from the mainland, is cut off by the tempestuous waters of the Pentland Firth, one of the most difficult and dangerous crossings in Britain. [...] Although the aeroplane has brought the Northern Isles nearer in time, they are still remote in the minds of men.[29]

Elsewhere, Stuart D. B. Picken, proposed in *The Soul of an Orkney Parish,* (1972):

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[26] See Stanley Cursiter, "Living in Scotland", in *Scottish Field* (October 1955), p. 44.
[27] A reference Maurice Fleming makes with regard to his interview with E. W. Marwick in his article "Out of Scotland – into Orkney", in *The Scots Magazine* 86, no. 6 (March-April-May 1967), p. 502.
[28] See E. W. Marwick, in *Scotland's Magazine* 52, no. 2 (February 1956), p. 24.
[29] See F. T. Wainwright, *The Northern Isles* (Toronto 1962), p. 1.

> When anyone first inhales the clear air of Orkney, he begins to breathe the fragrance of Orkney's past, so richly perfumed with romance. This atmosphere regularly strikes the holiday visitor. It becomes part of the life of a resident. It intoxicates with fascination and curiosity. It can be satisfied only by research and discovery, but even then, the haunting lingering spirit of the past beckons again. These islands and people are unique on the face of God's earth.[30]

In a similar fashion, Maurice Fleming's essay in *The Scots Magazine* (1966) contributes to the creation of a specific image of the Orkney Islands by stressing their otherness and by maintaining that one of the things one has to realise about Orkney is that it is "un-Scottish in very many ways" and that the Orcadian is highly conscious of it.[31] In the 1970s, another symbol of the island's uniqueness was the new political awareness of and the interest in the future of Orkney. The mid 1970s saw a reappraisal of the place held by Orkney and Shetland within the United Kingdom and a comparison between the attitudes of Britain and of Scandinavian countries to their remote communities.[32] Thus, Orkney increasingly came to be appreciated as "a unique community" exhibiting a

> distinctiveness which is rare in these days of standardization and super power blocks. This is seen in the islands' traditions [...] It is seen in the columns of the local newspapers and in the vitality of the programmes put out by Radio Orkney.[33]

On a literary level Orkney's links with well-known poets, writers and historians such as Robert Rendall (1898-1967), J. Storer Clouston (1870-1944), Eric Linklater (1899-1974) and the poet and critic Edwin Muir have, in the twentieth century, contributed to the representation of and a growing interest in Orkney as a place with a distinct identity. Muir's seminal autobiography *The Story and the Fable* (1940), and particularly the accounts of his childhood in Wyre, strongly influenced the image the reading public had of the Northern Isles. Praised by *The Spectator* as "one of the most unusual, most important biographies of our time", it most vividly demonstrates Muir's vision of Orkney as an extraordinary place: "The Orkney I was born into was a place where there was no great distinction between the ordinary and the fabulous; the lives of living men turned into legend."[34] As a successor of Edwin Muir and Eric Linklater, it was George Mackay Brown who came to be most readily associated with Orkney. But even though Brown regarded himself as a poet working

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[30] See Stuart D. B. Picken, *The Soul of an Orkney Parish* (Kirkwall 1972), pp. 1-6.
[31] See M. Fleming "Out of Scotland – into Orkney", in *The Scots Magazine* 86, p. 502.
[32] See Eric Linklater, *Orkney and Shetland. An Historical, Geographical, Social and Scenic Survey* (London 1980), "Shaping the Future", p. 271.
[33] Ibid., according to Linklater, a submission by Stromness Community Council supporting Orkney Islands' Council stand against uranium ended with the words: "Orkney is a unique community which could be totally destroyed by all that is involved in uranium mining" (p. 269).
[34] See Edwin Muir, *The Story and the Fable*, p. 4.

in the tradition of northern writing, making the islands and their past a point of reference, he was anxious not to dwell on any romantic ideas about Orkney or the Norse and Viking history. While maintaining that Orkney, "cut off from the story of its past, is meaningless", he was aware that many people had a rather romantic reverence for the history of Orkney and the Vikings, a "kind of sentimental make-believe history, very different from the terrible and fruitful things that actually happened to our ancestors".[35] Thus, in *An Orkney Tapestry* he made an attempt to "see the Vikings plain", being anxious not to "fill the corridors of history with unreal figures and hollow voices".[36] In doing so he challenged familiarised images and representations of Orkney in the past and in the present.

While some readers have admittedly displayed a genuine interest in Brown's writing, appreciating the Orcadian and Norse background to many of his works, the prospect of finding some kind of living literary artefact in Stromness yet contributed to a rather romanticised image of Brown as "the Orkney bard". As he himself indicated in a radio interview, many people expected to find him living in a farmhouse somewhere in the timeless and unchanging countryside of Orkney far away from modern civilisation, with a few hens or pigs behind the house.[37] This unrealistic picture of the writer and his home, supported by the media and photographers who liked portraying him in cornfields, near the sea on lonely beaches, in rural country scenery or scenes that evoke the Stromness of the past, was eagerly taken up by readers and critics. Orkney came to be identified with Brown's fictional worlds and in turn his writing could not be thought of any more without the idealised Orkney setting. As a result a twofold process set in: while the marginality and the perceived otherness of the Islands themselves as well as Brown's creative portrayal of that place and its way of life became constitutive of the imaginary and emotional repertoires and responses of the urban centres, inviting both nostalgia and fascination, they were, at the same time, identified as the other poles of a dominant culture. This dissuaded some critics from regarding Brown as a serious artist engaged in significant pursuits. Analysing the patterns and manifestations of margin-periphery relations social theorists have explained such a process thus:

> The "Top" attempts to reject and eliminate the "Bottom" for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low symbolically, as

[35] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, pp. 19 and 20.
[36] Ibid., p. 20.
[37] See BBC material relating to a programme celebrating GMB's 70th birthday in 1991. ("The weaver of time"); in Edinburgh University Library (EULIB), Special Collections (Spec. Col.), MS 3116.3.

> a primary [...] constituent of its own fantasy life [...] It is for this reason that what is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central.[38]

Labels such as "Orkney poet", "bard" or "parochial writer" that were hung on Brown often gave rise to misunderstandings and misinterpretation. In addition, geographic concepts such as "central" and "marginal" which were employed as classifications of places, using binary oppositions such as high/low, centre/periphery or inside/outside also served as means of political, cultural and literary categorisation.[39] Social theorists have pointed out that it is natural to think in oppositions and create a system of truth that builds on orders and structures that depend on such binary pairs as absence/presence, inside/outside or centre/periphery; however, modern critical theorists have argued that this system of thought, which lies at the core of Western philosophy and culture, creates power structures that induce particular social actions whereby political, social and cultural stereotyping, labelling and "straitjacketing" are only minor side-effects. It has further been argued by various thinkers, of whom the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida has been the most influential, that the terms in these oppositions do not represent equal values. This means that whereas the "centre" is considered superior, the second, "periphery" is defined as derivative, undesirable, and subordinate. In this way, the official discourse that builds on a system of truth, and derives from that very logic which Derrida calls "logocentrism", has resulted in a discourse of power which underlies all domains of our society.[40] Similarly, the French philosopher Michel Foucault regards the opposition of centres and peripheries as a complex idea that is produced by a range of social or discursive practices, such as the media or other

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[38] See P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression* (London 1986), p. 5.

[39] Generally, the concept of structure is deeply imbued with the tradition of Structuralism. Orders and structures are shaped through hierarchising and polarising. Social theorists have argued that the division of geographical space into near-far, central-peripheral, inside-outside was one of the first forms of "primitive classification" underpinning all social division, thus being a fundamental basis to mechanisms of ordering and sense-making in European cultures. For a discussion of cultural spatialisation and margin-periphery relations see Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin. Alternative geographies of modernity* (London and New York 1992), especially pp. 3-24. See also P. Stallybrass and A. White, *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression* (London 1986), pp. 2-3.

[40] The "logocentrism" of Western culture lies in its quest for an authoritative language that can reveal truth, moral rightness and beauty. From Plato to Bertrand Russell, Western thinkers charged philosophy with the task of establishing a universal language that could disclose what is real, true, right, and beautiful. However, instead of proposing his own system of truth, Derrida turned against the very idea of trying to uncover an order of truth. Beginning with his seminal book *Of Grammatology* (1976) and elaborating further in *Writing and Difference* (1988) Derrida attempted to show that claims to intellectual authority cannot withstand serious scrutiny. By deconstructing hierarchical oppositions he aimed to show that they are not natural but constructions, produced by discourses that rely on power and hierarchical relations, and thus organise identities and cultures in terms of oppositions.

social discourses.[41] With regard to Brown's work the discursive practices of critics, journalists and the media, as well as publishers, scholars and other literary and cultural institutions including tourist-boards, have (often for promotional reasons) contributed to the making of a particular image of the poet and have initiated a specific discourse that tends to focus on whether he is to be considered as parochial or not, as Scottish or Orcadian in literary and stylistic orientation, and whether he is "old-fashioned" in technique and outlook or innovative; in short, whether he is "in" or "out" of the fashionable literary oeuvres and tastes. As a result, his work was examined and evaluated according to the yardsticks of the dominant establishments.

In an attempt to explain why insular literature has long been neglected and viewed as marginal by the dominant and established English literature, Susan Bassnett suggests that it is the hegemony of English as a language, as a literature and as a political system that has resulted in a marginalisation of a great deal of writing from elsewhere in the British Isles.[42] Although Scottish literature and an interest in its regions and peripheries has flourished in the second half of the twentieth century (particularly since the modernist celebration of place as an aesthetic category during the Scottish literary Renaissance in the 1940s and '50s), it has long been subsumed under the heading of "British" or "English" Literature and has been denied its own voice and standing. That recent accounts of modern British writing have had difficulty in situating Brown, or that they write him out of the literary canon, seems inevitable in the light of this argument. However, to suggest that the centre-periphery-debate with regard to contemporary Scottish writing is merely a matter of Scottish versus English would be an oversimplification. Rather, one wonders whether Glasgow and Edinburgh have not become to the Scottish northern peripheries what

[41] The term "discourse" is used in critical theory, especially in the writings of Michel Foucault, when discussing systems of representation (linguistic or symbolic) through which power sustains itself. For Foucault discourse manifests itself only through concrete examples operating within specific areas of social and institutional practice. He argues that within individual discourses a series of mechanisms is used as a means of controlling desire and power, which facilitates classification, ordering and distribution. In this way a mastery is exerted over what appears to be the randomness of everyday reality. For details see M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York 1974); also his *Power/Knowledge – Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (Hemel Hempstead 1980).

[42] See Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature. A Critical Introduction* (Oxford 1993), especially pp. 65-68. I understand the word hegemony as Antonio Gramsci defined it. Gramsci's Italian prison notebooks have greatly influenced how power and ideology have been theorised among later Marxist thinkers such as Althusser. Like Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht and Bloch in Weimar Germany, Gramsci emphasises the cultural aspects of power. His key concept of "hegemony" in particular, is related to "consent" in "civil society" and is contrasted to direct domination and has been much used in later critical cultural studies. See *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York 1971), p. 12. Foucault's *Power/Knowledge* will further elucidate the mechanisms that relate to "power" and hierarchical power-relations.

London has long been to Scotland, bearing in mind that the literature of Orkney and Shetland features marginally in the context of Scottish Literature.[43]

As regards the relation between Orkney and Scotland Brown might not have been aware of the underlying political or sociological mechanisms that are thought to relate centres to peripheries, but he certainly felt that the Islanders were somehow "between" cultures and that they had an ambiguous relationship with Scotland:

> To Orcadians, Scotland has always been a problem. We belong and we do not belong. Islanders still speak of "going south to Scotland", on holiday or on business.[44]

He was also aware that his re-creations and representations of the Islands were frequently misunderstood as promoting their otherness, although he indicated in *An Orkney Tapestry* that, in his portrayal of Orkney, he was "interested in facts only as they tend and gesture, like birds and grass and waves, in the 'gale of life'."[45]

[43] Schoene is right when he points out that while Brown was considered to be one of the most prominent Scottish writers of the late twentieth century, there is surprisingly little criticism of his work: "Cairns Craig's *History of Scottish Literature* mentions Brown only marginally, and merely as a poet, in Roderick Watson's contribution, "Internationalising Scottish Poetry" [...] the significance of his prose writings remains entirely undiscussed." See B. Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia*, p. 10.

[44] See GMB, "My Scotland: Orkney and Scotland", in *The Scottish Review* 36 (November 1984), p. 15.

[45] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, pp. 1-2. Moreover, in a letter to David Morrison Brown anxiously points out that "I hope everyone will [...] not think I am a Scottish Nationalist. I am not a Nationalist." In The National Library of Scotland, Spec. Col., Acc 6374, no. 1.

4. GMB: the Outsider as Insider or Orkney as "Centre".

While positions of difference and even exclusion, margins can also be positions of creativity, power and critique, animating a discourse about social and cultural identities. Brown responded to such concepts as the "marginal" in his own way and made a case for his own subversive potential; following Karl Mannheim's notion of the intellectual who is a perpetual wanderer and universal stranger, an exile who proclaims universal foundations against local values, Brown subsequently tried to expose the relativism of cultural identities. In this classical reversal the view from the margin becomes the only determinant of universally-binding truth. Brown's "use" of Orkney, the centre around which most of his stories move is an idiosyncratic and highly personalised one. His writing, which is a celebration of the people of Orkney, ancient rituals and patterns of life as well as its history and legends, has re-created Orkney and made it a nodal point of his imagination. The centrality he gave to his native islands, however, did not grow out of the conscious attempt to create an anti-establishment aesthetic, using strategies which he rejected. On the contrary, he tried to suggest to his readers that they must not look to him for a photographic record of present-day Orkney. In a column for *The Orkney Herald*, he pointed out that "facts are free but comment is sacred", and by this paradox he intended to convey that what we commonly call facts, may have little value if used only superficially. By creating an Orkney of his own mind, a spiritual centre that allowed him to see facts as they bear relevance for humanity, Brown created a place for himself that was in a way out of time and space and defied traditional categorisation. He constructed a synthetic account of Orkney and of life in general by exploiting the multiplicity of its appearances through time and through the various characters. In this process, the forces and processes of memory and mind became central. Orkney served him as a central source and inspiration without this limiting his creativity or indicating indifference to the contemporary world; he created an Orkney drawn from a fictional and factual past, making it the centre of his vision, an Archimedean point of essential importance that allowed him to see life from a stance outside ideologies or power-related discourses; thus he could at the same time be inside and outside. In a radio interview, Brown explained why and in what way Orkney could take on such a centrality:

> I don't see where you could be more central than in a place like Orkney [...] In Orkney you see life in the round [...] It's impossible to see everything and I think you've got to limit your viewpoint in one way in order to see further in the way in which you want to see [...] I think there's so much to write about Orkney that there's no need to go further afield.[46]

[46] See "*Arts in Scotland* ", Radio 4, 18/11/1975.

Commenting on this consciously chosen stance, the poet Ted Hughes observed that Brown needed to move out of the immediate discourse of everyday life and everyday poetry, out of a life of facts that will suddenly be dated: "He has retreated to a point where he can see the world in a very clear simplification, penetrate it in a clarity that he could never achieve in a hurly-burly."[47]

Yet, Brown did not retreat to a fixed point where he was restricted and limited in his creative and artistic possibilities. He was constantly shifting positions and changing his points of view of the things he wished to present. He looked at events and characters from different distances and stances, thus challenging the notion of identity and meaning. (The use of different artistic styles in Brown's novel *Magnus* for instance can be interpreted as a function of different distances that they produce between us and the events and characters depicted.) Having made Orkney his point of reflection Brown was not limited to it as a mere locality. Even though he transposed material and ideas that he had assimilated from other writers or trends into the Orkney context, he did so with the aim of transcending the merely local, using it as a microcosm of the world. By doing so, he followed the example of many writers who used particular locations as a universal background for their stories and novels: James Joyce, Thomas Hardy and William Faulkner, to mention but a few. In his own use of place Brown comes close to Faulkner who explained that by writing about the American South, "I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it."[48] Given this, Brown's aesthetic approach is not particularly unusual. Especially in the context of modern Scottish writing his work can be seen as being part of various literary traditions and movements. His links, for instance, with the Scottish ballad and folk-tale tradition have been emphasised by many critics such as Alan Bold and others. In addition it is important to mention his work and achievement in relation to a period of Scottish writing which was arguably the most creative and varied time in the history of Scottish literature: the years roughly from 1920-1950, also called the "Scottish Renaissance". Writers of the Scottish literary Renaissance believed that any significant national literature should, by making use of the local, move beyond the boundaries of parochial significance to a timeless universality. Referring to this, Francis Russel Hart maintains that it is a "paradox of Scottish fiction that closeness to a small community is access to the most far-flung world in space and time".[49]

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[47] See BBC material relating to GMB's 70th birthday, containing an interview with Ted Hughes, "The weaver of Time", in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3166.3, tape 1.
[48] See Kay Dick (ed.) *Writers at Work* (London 1972), pp. 35-36
[49] See Francis Russel Hart, *The Scottish Novel* (London 1978), p. 402.

Undeniably, Brown's work can be seen as occupying a significant place within that tradition. At any rate, to regard his involvement with the fictional creation and re-creation of a particular place image of Orkney as a cultural and social activity could help to acknowledge it as part of a process of "cultural spatialisation", a term used by Rob Shields to designate the ongoing social and cultural construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary.[50] In this way Brown's singular way of binding space and time on a fictional level allowed him to take part in the social construction of Orkney, or as Schoene puts it, the "Making of Orcadia".

With regard to the derogatory view that Brown's work might be parochial, Patrick Kavanagh's definition of parochialism offers a different understanding of the word. His distinction between parochialism and provincialism presents an alternative way of perceiving the literary output of the British Isles and particularly Brown's work. Both in his poetry and his literary journalism, Kavanagh was from the mid-1940s onwards, engaged in deconstructing and replacing the still dominant nationalist symbolic framework. He countered the syncretic national myth of a monolithic Ireland with a "parish myth". By presenting a mosaic of different regions rather than trying to artificially unify Ireland, he drew attention to the cultural diversity and insisted on the primacy of the local in literature. Kavanagh consciously set out to re-evaluate the pejorative term "parochial". In *Kavanagh's Weekly*, he gives his definition of parochialism and provincialism:

> Parochialism and provincialism are direct opposites. The provincial has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis – towards which his eyes are turned – has to say on any subject. [...] The parochial mentality on the other hand is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish. All great civilisations are based on parochialism – Greek, Israelite, English. [...] it requires a great deal of courage to be parochial. [...] In recent times we had two great Irish parishioners – James Joyce and George Moore. They explained nothing. The public had to come to them or stay in the dark. And the public did come.[51]

In Kavanagh's view, parochialism and provincialism are opposites: the latter having no mind of its own, following the mainstream English models or reacting against them; the former, however, is seen as being universal in the way it deals with the fundamentals on which a writer's regional, social and artistic identity is built. Thus, he deconstructs the hierarchical relationship between the periphery and the centre. In the aesthetic sphere parochialism signifies artistic integrity in the evocation of a local

[50] See Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin* (London 1991). However, Shields also points out that spatialisation sets in motion more than an imaginary geography: "As a fundamental system of spatial divisions (e.g. subject-object) and distinctions (e.g. near-far, present-absent) spatialisation provides part of the necessary social co-ordination of perceptions to ground hegemonic systems of ideology and practice" (p. 46).

[51] See Patrick Kavanagh, in *Kavanagh's Weekly*, 24/5/1952.

way of life. Authenticity of representation is the primary virtue of the parochial artist, whereas the provincial will distort or falsify his material to make it conform to the images and convictions sanctioned by a powerful cultural establishment. Thus, a parochial writer is one who is independent and courageous enough to value what an "intellectual" or an orthodox writer would dismiss as backward or insignificant. The term parochialism, then, has lost its derogatory meaning and cannot serve any more to belittle a writer's work and outlook. Seen in this light, Brown might in fact be regarded as truly parochial, for he wrote about what Kavanagh called the fundamentals, using Orkney and his Orcadian identity as a departure point for a much larger vision. He was, as Kavanagh demanded from a truly great artist, "part of life as it is lived by the ordinary people".[52]

Discussing modern British writing and culture Cairns Craig has taken up the notion of the truly parochial and the idea that it is precisely the condition of "being between" – between cultures, between readily discernible literary camps, between traditions, oeuvres and movements – that has made modern British writing and poetry powerful and rich: "It is in the tension *between*, not the fulfilment through, tradition(s) that the poetry has been created." Craig concludes that the real being of modern British poetry is its "being between", its "acceptance of what Seamus Heaney called the achievement of the 'truly parochial'."[53]

Being "inside", "between", or "out of" identifiable cultural, social, political or literary categories is an epistemic and ontological phenomenon that has become a central topos of modern thought, theory and writing, informing notions of reality and truth. The sociologist George Simmel has noted that it is impossible to understand the processes by which we create meaning and establish an identity without relating to terms such as "here" or "there", or "inside" and "outside". When we try to create meaning we seek to identify with places and to affirm community. However, our position in the world is defined by the fact that in every dimension of our being and our behaviour we stand at every moment between two boundaries. This condition is seen to constitute the formal structure of our existence, manifesting itself in countless ways and in all forms of human expression. Simmel explains that we are

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[52] See Patrick Kavanagh, in *The Irish Press*, 19/4/1943. With regard to Brown, some qualification is needed here. Although it seems easy to associate Brown with Kavanagh's kind of parochialism and to reassess his work in this new light, in a strict sense Kavanagh would have had problems with Brown, since Brown was going back to a "dead past" for themes while Kavanagh's emphasis was on "contemporary life", life as it is lived now. Kavanagh did not think much of the "backward look", characteristic of an artistic separatism such as he saw in Yeats and his obsession with Irish myth.

[53] See Cairns Craig, "Being Between", in *Out of History. Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (Edinburgh 1996), pp. 191 and 193.

> constantly orienting ourselves, even when we do not employ abstract concepts, to an "over us" and an "under us", to a right and a left, to a more or less, a tighter or looser, a better or worse. The boundary, above and below, is our means for finding direction in the infinite space of our worlds.[54]

Since there are boundaries everywhere in the world, Simmel concludes that, accordingly, we *are* boundaries. Insofar as every content of life, every feeling, experience or thought possesses a certain intensity and a certain position in some order of things, there proceeds from each content a continuum in two directions, towards its two poles. Although the existence of contrasting poles implies discord and conflict, Simmel's sociological approach stresses the significance of the sociologically positive character of conflict. For him, an absolutely centripetal and harmonious state of being, culture or society is not only empirically unreal but does not show any real-life process:

> Every content thus participates in two continua, which meet in it, and which it bounds. This participation in realities, tendencies, and ideas which involve a plus and minus, a this side and a that side of our here and now, may well be obscure and fragmentary; but it gives life two complementary, if often also contradictory, values: richness and determinacy.[55]

In the light of these arguments it follows that a better understanding of the nature and the artistic value of Brown's condition of "being between" Scottish, English, Scandinavian and European ways of writing can only be gained by putting his work in the context of other writers and other traditions of thought. In an attempt to do so, the 1940s and '50s – times of great cultural and political ferment and in many ways seminal for Brown's development – need to be taken into consideration. In these years Brown paved the way for his career as a poet and writer. In the 1950s he lived in Dalkeith and Edinburgh, continuing his education first at Newbattle Abbey College, then at Edinburgh University, where he was immersed in the literary life of the time. Edinburgh in the 1940s and '50s was a congenial setting for the literary avant-garde and Brown found himself amidst many aspiring poets and writers. Without doubt, the years spent in Edinburgh opened up new horizons for him and influenced his further approach to writing and life in general. Therefore, without wishing to "compartmentalise" his work or refer to him in terms of easily identifiable literary camps, I shall investigate in what ways these formative years shaped his work, vision and career. First I will analyse Edwin Muir's importance before proceeding to a consideration of the impact of Gerard Manley Hopkins' work and the influence of Thomas Mann as an example of European traditions of writing. I wish to

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[54] See George Simmel, "The Transcendent Character of Life" (1918), in *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago 1971), p. 353.
[55] Ibid., p. 354.

challenge the commonplace view frequently embraced by journalists, critics and scholars that Brown's work defies easy categorisation and thus stands apart from recognisable movements and traditions. Alan Bold, for instance, held that it is impossible to place Brown's work into any of the popular literary camps and that his work has "neither the gimmickry of modernism nor the quasi-photographic fidelity of documentary realism"; he concludes that Brown was too much of a "law unto himself" to be classified in traditional critical terms.[56] This does not mean that I wish to establish neat categories and labels that can be used when discussing Brown's work. On the contrary: it is crucial not to deny his idiosyncratic approach or the distinctive Orcadian background on which his imagination thrived, since it is precisely this creative tension between Orkney as a source of potent symbols, and other literary and extra-literary contexts and influences, that has given his work its distinctive profile and made his outlook on art and life more comprehensive.

[56] See Alan Bold, *George Mackay Brown*, p. 1

5. Conclusion

As pointed out earlier, criticism of Brown's work has focused on his Scottish, more particularly his Orcadian background. There has been a tendency to think of Brown in terms of Orkney only. Orkney has served as the framework, the system of values according to which his works were rated. No doubt, his native islands and the Scandinavian historical, sociological, linguistic and literary background were one of the main sources of inspiration for Brown. His imaginative accounts of the Orkney people and their legendary past as well as his portraits of contemporary Orcadian life have come to speak for the Islands as well as for the whole of Scotland. For him there was endless nourishment for the imagination and many potent symbols and themes came to him from Norse history and legends. His native islands held his imagination in a creative tension and provided a pattern and a frame. Nevertheless, it was not due to a patriotic reverence for Orkney, that Brown referred to that place, using it as a backdrop and a quarry for symbols and imagery. Orkney as a social, political and cultural entity, though it spurred his artistic imagination and features strongly in his work, was not the limit of his horizon or the essence of his art. When asked by E. W. Marwick what made his short stories "Orkney stories", Brown was anxious to point out that they are only Orkney stories in that they are set in an Orkney landscape, or in Orkney history. He maintained that there is no such being as an Orkney man or woman. The characters in his novels and stories are, as he put it: "just human beings who happen to live in Hoy or Stromness or Sandwick". Although he was aware that people are conditioned "a little by their environment, and by their occupations" it was their humanity, the fact of their being human beings that fascinated him most.[57] Consequently, he did not think of himself as an "Orkney writer"; the only things that he thought made him one were the fact that he lived in Orkney, that he was influenced by the sagas and that Orkney with its ability to provide symbols and images, served as a literary breeding ground for his ideas and his vision.[58] Thus, Orkney was in no way a yardstick or the measure of all things for him. Rather, one might regard it as a springboard and a starting-point for his much greater vision. Brown regarded Orkney as a "microcosm of the inhabited globe" where most types that compose the human race mingle.[59] Therefore I would disagree with Schoene's statement that "although there are many parallels and correspondences between the life of the Orcadians and that of people elsewhere it remains doubtful if it has ever

[57] See unpublished script for Scottish Radio (1969) in which GMB discusses his own work with E. W. Marwick; see Kirkwall Library Archive, material concerning E. W. Marwick, no. 30/3/2.
[58] Ibid.
[59] See GMB "The Art of Narrative", MS (Stromness 14/1/1988); in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3112.8.

been Brown's concern to draw attention to such likenesses".[60] I would maintain that, on the contrary, it was Brown's very concern to highlight those things that all people share and that make them human beings first, and then Orcadians, Scots, English etc. This is supported by Brown's fascination with the shifting human relationships and the perennial patterns and rhythms of life and history. Also, his observation that Orkney is a fitting microcosm for the human condition as a whole speaks for itself. When asked to comment on his artistic relation to the people of Orkney, Brown asserted: "The humanity – the fact of their being human beings – is what really interests me."[61]

Although Brown's ability to widen his vision and invest the typically Orcadian consciousness and the local setting with a universal relevance has been acknowledged by some critics it tends, on the whole, to be underrated. Moreover, over the years Brown's personal and artistic relation to Orkney has nourished the imagination of critics and readers to an extent that Brown found hard to cope with. Not only did it help to create an image of him as living the same life as the farmers or fishermen of his stories, but it frequently belittled his artistic vision giving credence to the view that his work was parochial in the sense of narrow and provincial. In a comment to the poem "Letters to the River", he reveals how tiresome it was to be told over and over that his writing tended to be parochial and that his work must and always will be confined to a narrow circle.

> This is my situation. Reviewers and critics tell me that I write about Orkney – and wisely so [...] This attitude to a writer and his work frequently irritates me. It devalues the element of imagination that is all-important in an artist. A true artist should be able to describe life on a speck of dust.[62]

As hitherto unpublished material reveals, Brown felt strongly about critics' attempts to compartmentalise his work, seeing him only within the parameters of a discourse on Orkney. That he felt strait-jacketed by critics and the media can be seen when considering his remark that he was "tired of being imprisoned for life in the Orkneys by critics." However, "Letters to the River", set "in some vaguely oriental country – Siam, or Burma, or Vietnam", helped him to escape from the "prison" of Orkney:

> What pleased me about the poem is that it became a key. I could escape whenever I liked from the prison where the critics wanted me to stay.[63]

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[60] See B. Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia*, p. 11.

[61] See questionnaire sent by D. J. Jones to GMB (1979): Q.: "To what extent is Orkney a fitting microcosm for the human condition as a whole?" A.: "Same as any other community. Only here one can observe the whole more closely." For the interview with E. W. Marwick see Kirkwall Archive, material concerning E. W. Marwick, 1969.

[62] See "Letters to the River. A Poem and a commentary" (1979), in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 2134/2/2.

[63] Ibid.

Although Brown recognised that he was working within a particular and ancient tradition of storytelling, he tried to distance himself on many occasions from nationalistic trends or intentions. While marginality makes the discourse about social and cultural identities possible, Brown's articulation of it calls for the incorporation of different voices into a de-politicised framework where questions of "inside" or "outside" do not prevail over questions about an essentially human situation. He believed that his chosen tasks as poet and storyteller were not specific to poets or the storytelling tradition in Orkney, but that they were perennial tasks of writers all over the world. Thus, he attempted to undermine the notion of the "Orkney writer" and spoke against the belief that there is a special predicament for Scottish writers:

> The Predicament of the Scottish Writer: how many articles, essays and radio talks have there been in the last half century on that subject? What does it mean, the predicament of the Scottish writer? The only predicament a writer anywhere is faced with is how to write well [...] It doesn't matter whether the writer comes from Greenland or Panama or New Guinea, that is the perennial predicament to do what it is in him to do, to the best of his ability. What writer worth his salt thinks when he sits down [...] about whether or not he is in a predicament or not (especially the Scottish variety of predicament). To worry overmuch about being in or getting out of a predicament is to wound the air.[64]

Although Brown's relationship with his native islands was a symbiotic one he did not have any nostalgic feelings about his task as a writer, as the above comments demonstrate. Although he was aware of his responsibilities and his role as a modern "skald" and rememberer of the past, he did not intend to limit this to Orkney and the Orkney people. Considering his remarks, there is a certain irony in the suggestion that he has "chosen to live in a room with only one single window", since this "prison", as Brown calls it, was partly constructed by critics themselves.

On reflection it can be concluded that critical response to Brown's work has tended to restrict itself to discussions of place in the context of modern poetics, the literary and socio-political values of regionalism and his use of locality or setting as a means of creating a feeling of community, authenticity and national identity. Scotland and Orkney have tended to be the measure for Brown-criticism, serving as a backdrop and a criterion according to which his work has been assessed.[65] In view of this the approaches taken to evaluate his work tend to be limiting. While appreciating former critical works by scholars and others who set out to assess aspects of Brown's

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[64] See GMB, "The Writer's Predicament", MS (1985), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3112.8.

[65] See *The Spectator*, 23/10/1971: "George Mackay Brown, [who] is one of the most skilful poetic craftsmen now writing in English [...] His homeland, the Orkneys, appears to be the source of this strength, though he is much more than a 'regional' writer." Orkney is recognised as the source of his artistic imagination. At the same time, the critic is anxious to emphasise that Brown is not a "regional" writer. However, this statement is made without any qualifications or reasons as to why he is or why he could be a "regional" writer, or what it is that makes him different from "regional" writers.

work, I would suggest that attempts to overemphasise his "use" of Orkney and his perceived wish to foster a particular feeling of regional identity are hazardous.

6. The comparative approach

Inspired by Goethe, who made the concept of "Weltliteratur" famous which was to set ideals for comparative studies,[66] Matthew Arnold propounded in his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1857:

> Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures.[67]

Any attempt to draw a literary profile of George Mackay Brown and to contextualise his work thus depends on a wider field of investigation. While aware of the need to be selective in terms of choice of theme and method, I wish to present an evaluation of Brown's work which includes comparative methods and approaches. The question of what a comparative approach is, or indeed what Comparative Literature is, and whether it has its own methodology, has occupied considerable space in literary criticism, theory and research.[68] It has been indicated that the term itself looks back to a history of violent debate that goes back to its earliest usage. Ever since, the concept has been rather elastic in its application. The ongoing and at times heated discussion about the nature of comparative literature, about whether it is to be considered as an independent discipline or as an approach to literature based on a certain "Weltanschauung" within the general field of literary studies and literary history, has also led to misconceptions and confusion. Without question, however, comparing and contextualising is part of an overall approach to literature and life in general. H. M. Possnett, drawing attention to the obvious, remarked in 1886:

> The comparative method of arguing or communicating knowledge is in one sense as old as thought itself. [...] All reason, all imagination, operate subjectively, and pass from man to man objectively, by aid of comparisons and differences.[69]

George Steiner argues that every activity whereby we attempt to make sense of form, in language, art or music, is comparative. The action by which we respond to external

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[66] For more on Goethe's idea of "Weltliteratur" (World Literature) see A. Gillies, "Herder and the Preparation of Goethe's idea of 'Weltliteratur'"; in *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 9 (1931-1933), pp. 46-67.

[67] See Matthew Arnold, *On the Modern Element in Literature*, Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Oxford, 14/11/1857. Quoted in S. Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, p. 1.

[68] I cannot concern myself here with questions of what comparative literature is today, what it has been, how it has been put to use in different countries at different periods, or what it comprises. For a comprehensive and historical account of the theories and schools of comparative literature as well as definitions of related terms (e.g. influence or reception) see Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory. Survey and Introduction*; trans. by William Riggan in collaboration with the author (London 1968); also Newton P. Stallknecht and Horst Frenz (eds.) *Comparative Literature. Method and Perspective* (London and Amsterdam 1961; revised edition 1971); Robert J. Clements, *Comparative Literature As Academic Discipline. A Statement of Principles, Praxis, Standards* (New York 1978); Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature. A Critical Approach.*

[69] See Hutcheson Macauley Posnett, *Comparative Literature* (London 1886), p. 73.

stimuli is like a dialogue that we enter into with what is new, so that we can incorporate the new into the known. In this sense hermeneutic mechanisms underlie any act of cognition or recognition in which we seek to understand by placing the object before us into an informing context of previous and related experience. He concludes that comparison is implicit in any hermeneutic process and that "to read is to compare. From their inception, literary studies and the arts of interpretation have been comparative."[70] I agree with Steiner in that a comparative approach is a precondition of interpretative studies and is a natural widening of the field of investigation. Consequently, this study attempts to be more than a mere comparison of individual works or writers.

Within my chosen approach I am aware that such terms as "influence" and "reception" have, in the context of comparative literature studies, become slightly unfashionable. Partly, this is due to a reaction against the plethora of so called "influence-studies" or "source-studies" produced in the 1920s and again in the 1960s, deriving mainly from the French positivistic school.[71] Some scholars seem to feel that to indicate an author's literary debts belittles his originality. However, originality need not to be understood in terms of innovation:

> originality consists, not [...] primarily in innovations in materials or of style and manner, but in the genuineness and effectiveness of the artistic moving power of the creative work. [...] What genuinely moves the reader aesthetically and produces an independent artistic effect has artistic originality, whatever its debts. The original author is not necessarily the innovator or the most inventive, but rather the one who succeeds in making all his own.[72]

One of the components which makes us assume a certain influence is similarity. But similarity between works or ideas is perceived only with reference to an already existing value-system, a tradition. Thus, if we are to talk about influences, it is only within a larger context that the work of a writer or his modification of a tradition can be appreciated. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" T. S. Eliot argued that there is a tendency among critics to insist – when they praise a poet or writer – on those aspects of the work in which he or she least resembles anyone else:

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[70] See Steiner, "What is comparative literature?"; in *Comparative Criticism* 18 (1996), pp. 157-159.

[71] According to Weisstein, Paul Van Tieghem, Jean-Marie Carré and Marius-Francois Guyard are typical representatives of the Paris School of comparative literature. See Weisstein, pp. 1-5; Guyard, for instance regarded comparative literature as "a branch of literary history; it is the study of international spiritual relations, of 'rapports de fait' between Byron and Pushkin, Goethe and Carlyle, [...] and between the works, the inspirations and even the lives of writers belonging to different literatures." See M.- F. Guyard, *La Littérature Compareé* (Paris 1961), p. 5; quoted in Weisstein, p. 3.

[72] See J. T. Shaw, "Literary Indebtedness and Comparative Literary Studies", pp. 85-86; in N. P. Stallknecht and H. Frenz, pp. 84-97. For more on the problem of "influence" see also Ihab H. Hassan, "The Problem of Influence in Literary History: Notes Towards A Definition"; in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14 (1955), pp. 66-76.

> In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors [...]; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.[73]

Eliot further points out that "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone [...] You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead."[74] This would mean that Brown's work will appear of even greater consequence when seen against the background of other national and international writers, traditions and ideas. His relation to both the past and the present, and to past and contemporary movements, will not belittle his achievement but will define and underline the individual aspects of his work. Thus, my concern lies with the dialogue Brown entered into at different points of his life. This will contribute to an understanding of his sense of the world and the ways he responded to and interacted creatively with external stimuli. By tracing the development of his ideas and considering his transformations of, or his reaction to, concerns and materials that he found in the work of other writers, I shall make evident a certain solidarity in spirit between Brown and such poets and writers as Edwin Muir, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Mann. I shall also attempt to uncover some broader literary currents that affected his approach to literature and art. My method of investigation is concerned with the insights that external influences can give into the creative processes and the artistic imagination of George Mackay Brown. Brown's reception of other writers and their works, as well as his reaction to the prevailing "Zeitgeist", will clarify the ways in which he made use of different impulses and how he transformed or adopted them. It is not so much the minutiae of supposed influences which are of central concern but the use which Brown made, or did not make, of the stimuli to which he was exposed and the choices he made from the vast range of possibilities that were available to him. No doubt, some correspondences do not necessarily go back to direct influences but rather to comparable preoccupations of artists due to the existing cultural currents. With regard to the problem of influence this means that it is not always consciously received and that it might not leave any visible traces in the influenced work; more often than not it is something which is

[73] See T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London 1928), p. 48.
[74] Ibid., p. 49.

breathed in with the air of the times and, as André Gide put it, it "awakens", rather than "creates".[75]

Commenting on the work of Edwin Muir, Ritchie Robertson has pointed out that Muir's distinct "otherness" can only be understood by examining his indebtedness to specifically European traditions of writing in general and of German and Austrian literature in particular.[76] In a similar fashion I shall argue that any attempt to assess and appreciate George Mackay Brown's work will have to draw on a number of literary and extra-literary sources, contexts and influences that shaped his ideas about the nature of art and humanity. I shall therefore specify some of the British as well as European sources from which Brown drew his inspiration; in doing so I hope to contribute to the ongoing evaluation of his literary standing.

[75] See André Gide, *Prétextes: reflexions sur quelques points de littérature et de morale* (Paris 1963): "l'influence, disais-je, ne crée rien: elle éveille" (p. 20).

[76] See Ritchie Robertson, "Edwin Muir as European Poet", in C. J. M. MacLachlan and D. S. Robb (eds.), *Edwin Muir. Centenary Assessments* (Aberdeen 1990), pp. 102-118.

Chapter II

"Beginnings" – George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir

1. Introduction

Among the literary influences that shaped Brown's earliest approach to literature and art were Scandinavian folk-tales and stories, Grimm's fairy-tales, biblical stories and the Scottish ballads. Apart from a number of people in the town of Stromness where he was born, Brown's sister too had the gift of story-telling and used to practise on him when they were children. "No doubt," Brown once wrote in an autobiographical essay "these early seeds of narrative and poetry lie buried in a child's mind until, a quarter of a century or so later, they began to stir and throb."[1] According to Brown, his early contact with stories, folk-songs, and ballads established a certain "rhythm" and a "tone". He believed that while listening to stories out of the Old Testament at school, he was "absorbing, all unconsciously, form and rhythm and texture".[2] Such influences can be vital and formative; yet, since comparable stimuli have been available to a large number of people living in areas with a similar cultural, literary, geographical and social background – as for instance the strong oral tradition that has been kept alive in many of the western and northern isles of Scotland – this aspect can only partially illuminate Brown's creative development.

Another more significant experience – if not perhaps *the* most important of all – that shaped Brown's writing and gave a distinct direction to his life and career as a poet, was his encounter with Edwin Muir, first his works and then the man himself.[3] Brown had known the name of the Orcadian writer for a long time, but it was not until the mid-1940s that he came across Muir's work and started to read more widely in it. During the first half of the 1940s, Brown was, due to his suffering from tuberculosis, only able to do light work such as local reporting and writing articles or reviews for *The Orkney Herald* where he was responsible for two of the regular features, "Bookshelf" and "Island Diary". This situation, however, allowed him to read more widely and to practise writing verse as a pastime: "There was nothing to

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[1] See GMB, "An Autobiographical Essay", in Maurice Lindsay (ed.), *As I remember* (1978), p. 13.
[2] Ibid., p. 20.
[3] As to the literary relationship of George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir there exists only one essay by P. H. Butter that deals with both poets' attitude to time and the past. However, the essay does not explore the manifold nature of Muir's influence on Brown. See P. H. Butter, "George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir", in *Yearbook of English Studies* 17 (1977), pp. 17-30.

do but read, and occasionally scribble a verse or two (that nobody saw but my ex-Latin teacher John Cook)."[4] In 1945, while still working as a freelance journalist Brown reviewed Muir's autobiography *The Story and the Fable* (1940) and was very taken by it. To him, the book was "one of the most beautiful evocations of innocence and of the slow stainings and renewings of time in the language".[5] Although many of Muir's poems that Brown read in *The Listener* seemed to be "strange and baffling" at first, he was attracted to Muir's verse and began to admire it more and more.[6] In 1946, Muir's collection of poems, *The Voyage* was published and also moved Brown deeply. The effect the book had on him he later described

> as if a key had been turned in a door, I entered a chamber of pure lyrical meditation. Poem after poem enchanted me: "The Return", "The Transmutation", "In Love for Long".[7]

Given the marked effect that Muir's poems had on the aspiring young poet it is not entirely surprising to detect, particularly in Brown's early poems, a certain affinity with Muir's concerns and his aesthetic approach. Brown confirms this observation when he says about the resemblance of Muir's autobiography to the ways he thought and worked that "the same sort of idea was always there".[8] This likemindedness, or "spiritual brotherhood", was reinforced by Muir's being an Orcadian whose work drew on images from his childhood in Orkney. Brown found himself able to relate to his works on a literary and a personal level. Later, Muir became a kind of ideal to Brown and his literary-minded friends:

> we had found a new hero, and one moreover who had drawn the nourishment for his poetry from his childhood in Orkney. Even the texture of the verse had the grainings of Orkney in it: the shape mirrored the quiet flowering laterals of the Orkney fields and hills.[9]

Comments like the above are certainly telling with regard to the ways in which Brown related to Muir. However, an investigation into their literary relationship involves a clarification of Muir's personal as well as his literary and aesthetic effect on Brown's poetic development and his outlook on life and art. In the following I shall analyse the nature of their affiliation by considering Muir's influence on Brown, the man, before proceeding with a comparative discussion of both poets' approach to literature as displayed in selected works.

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[4] See "The Seven Ages of George Mackay Brown", in *The Scotsman*, 30/8/1986.
[5] See GMB, essay coda to *Edwin Muir. Selected Prose* (London 1987), p. 203.
[6] See GMB, "Edwin Muir at Newbattle", coda to *Edwin Muir. Selected Prose* (London 1987), p. 204.
[7] Ibid., p. 204; Brown meant "The Return of the Greeks". "The Return" was published in *The Labyrinth* (1949).
[8] See GMB, interview, in Isobel Murray (ed.), *Scottish Writers Talking* (East Linton 1996), p. 10.
[9] See GMB, essay coda to *Edwin Muir. Selected Prose*, p. 204.

2. Out of Orkney: Edwin Muir and Newbattle Abbey College

> *If I hadn't gone to Newbattle when Edwin Muir was warden there, I think I might never have been able to earn my living by writing [...] It was Edwin Muir who turned my face in the right direction: firmly but discretely – and gave me a pocketful of hope and promise for the journey.*[10]

After Brown had spent most of the 1940s reading and writing, living on National Assistance and supplementing his small income through local journalism, it was in the spring of 1951 that one of the more important events in his life occurred when Alex Doloughan, Director of Further Education for Orkney, asked him if he would like to go to Newbattle Abbey, a residential adult education college in Dalkeith, outside Edinburgh. The college had been established in 1936 but had closed down with the outbreak of war. In 1950 it reopened with Edwin Muir as warden. At the time, Brown had the "sense of having come to a dead end" and thus applied for admission.[11] As a result he was invited to meet Edwin Muir and his wife Willa who had returned to Orkney in the summer of 1951 for a holiday. Brown had not met Muir before but he had read his poetry and most of his prose works. Although, according to Brown, Muir was not the main reason for wanting to go to Newbattle, it can safely be assumed that the prospect of studying under the admired poet and critic made the idea even more attractive.[12] Muir had read some of Brown's work in *The New Shetlander* and, on the strength of it, invited him to take up a course in the following October.[13] Thus, in the autumn of 1951 Brown left Orkney where, as P. H. Butter has put it "hampered by ill health, he had achieved little by the age of thirty".[14] These developments were to change the whole course of his life. The change of scene, as well as the personal, cultural and intellectual challenge accompanying this move came at a time when Brown felt unhappy about his life in Orkney. In a letter to his friend Ernest Marwick in 1956 – by then a student of English at the University of Edinburgh – Brown underlines the importance of his decision to go away: "In some ways I miss Orkney, but my mode of life there was no good. I had to get out, or I'd have gone mad."[15] To leave Orkney and to embark on further education at Newbattle Abbey College under Edwin Muir was therefore an easy decision at the time and was never to be regretted; he was given the opportunity to study under the poet who had

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[10] See GMB, "Edwin Muir", MS (for *The Orkney View*, undated), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2845.1.
[11] See "The Seven Ages of George Mackay Brown", in *The Scotsman*, 30/8/1986.
[12] See interview with GMB of 10/4/1984; in *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 7.
[13] See GMB, "Edwin Muir and Newbattle", MS (4/2/1966), in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1777.
[14] See P. H. Butter, "George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir", in *Yearbook of English Studies* 17 (1977), p. 16.
[15] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 23/10/1956, in Kirkwall Library Archive, material about E. W. Marwick, D 31.

inspired his own writing and in the work of whom he recognised a likeness to his own ideas and thoughts.

On arrival at the college Brown felt cautious and suspicious, "ready to beat a retreat to the islands at the first sign of hostility", as he told Marwick. However, he found that

> what greets every new student is an atmosphere of extraordinary friendliness. It sounds almost unnatural, but since I arrived I haven't heard one bitter or spiteful word exchanged between any of the students. I don't know what is the cause of this harmony, but certainly respect and affection for the person of Edwin Muir is a contributory factor [...] It is quite a remarkable experience to listen to him. He is at all times a delightful man, simple and friendly.[16]

That there were no exams at the end of the course added to a feeling of harmony and ease and helped to establish an atmosphere free from strain and anxiety. Brown remembers that "all the discussions had an under-current of gaiety and good-humour".[17] Although there were no prizes, diplomas or degrees to be obtained, from the point of view of learning and creativity, Muir's time at Newbattle was considered by most students a great success.[18] Further contributing to a feeling of well-being among the students was the great kindness of the Muirs. Looking back to his time at Newbattle Brown recalls that "the great happiness we all experienced in those few months was largely due to that serene gentle quiet mind that directed our reading [...] and our first blundering literary efforts."[19]

Among the subjects to be studied at Newbattle were History, Philosophy, Economics, Literature and Psychology. Brown chose English and History. Muir instructed his students in the writing of English, teaching them to use a plain and concise style. Brown recollects that

> The burden of his lectures was that we should write as simply, tersely, concisely as possible – that is, we should strive after the plain style of which he himself was a master.[20]

Besides studying there was also time for recreation, such as poetry-reading circles, music circles, a debating society and a student magazine (*The Sun*) of which Brown was editor. Brown found the atmosphere very inspiring, all the more so because several of Scotland's future writers were also students there – poets, prose writers and dramatists such as Tom Scott and Archie Hind – so that there were always ideas

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[16] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 5/11/1951, in Kirkwall Library Archive.
[17] See GMB, "A Marvellous Singer. Recollections of Edwin Muir", in *Scottish Literature Association News* 61 (November – December 1963), p. 8.
[18] Ibid., p. 9.
[19] See GMB, "Edwin Muir"(MS), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2845.1.
[20] See GMB, "Edwin Muir at Newbattle", MS (4/2/1966), in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1777. The perfection of this style and the striving for a compressed diction was later to become the hallmark of Brown's own writing.

in circulation which, as Brown emphasised, "widened [his] horizons a good bit".[21] In the spring of 1952 he remarked on the positive impact that the college had on him: "The company is brave and stimulating. [...] writing comes like a song, and truly life is sweet."[22]

Muir invited students to do creative writing. Written assignments could be in the form of a poem, a short-story or literary criticism. When Brown presented some of his poems Muir was impressed by them.[23] Although, according to Brown, Muir saw little future for poets, he yet reassured and assisted his students in getting some of their works published. Thus, under the mentorship of Muir Brown was, for the first time, seriously encouraged to write. Both Willa and Edwin Muir had a very positive influence on him and the other students, as Brown acknowledges:

> They were very encouraging. It was the first time I'd ever had any real encouragement. There weren't many students at Newbattle when I was there, so Edwin had time to deal individually with students. We were required to submit an essay once a month [...]. I think I must have sent in two or three poems. In the end he sent a poem of mine to the *New Statesman* and they printed it. I was delighted about that because I never dreamed to have a poem in such an august magazine. He also sent a poem to *The Listener*. He was very good that way.[24]

"The Exile", the poem that Muir sent to *The Listener*, became one of Brown's first works to be published nation-wide (1952). This was a further step towards his career as a poet and later, short-story writer and novelist. However, as much as Brown's time at Newbattle seemed to be edenic and full of harmony, leaving Orkney was overshadowed by what he witnessed of life in an industrial city. He experienced first hand the reality and the effects of modern industrialism, feeling that it had done much harm to people. Similar to Muir's accounts of his experience in Glasgow, Brown's description of Dalkeith is a dark vision:

> When you walk through the streets of Dalkeith, and see the grim dour look that everyone wears, you might imagine you were in the outskirts of Purgatory. There is something bad and rotten about modern industrialism to give people such hopeless harsh faces.[25]

Yet it would appear that the time Brown spent at Newbattle was a successful and crucial period. Significantly, when looking back, he refers to it as "one of the happiest times I remember – perhaps the happiest".[26] Not only was it influential in

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[21] See *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 1.

[22] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 30/4/1952, Kirkwall Library Archive.

[23] It is interesting to note here that, at the time, Muir regarded Brown's verse as being better than his prose, which for his taste was too "loose and careless" (Brown in a letter to E. W. Marwick, 30/4/1952.)

[24] See William Sharpton, "Hamnavoe Revisited. An interview with George Mackay Brown", in *Chapman* 84 (September 1996), p. 20.

[25] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 5/11/1951. In a letter to Muir (1958), Brown even refers to Edinburgh as "this depressing town"; 19/10/1958, in National Library of Scotland, Spec. Col., Acc 10557.

[26] See GMB, *Under Brinkie's Brae* (Edinburgh 1979), p. 34.

many personal ways but it also allowed him to focus on his literary interests while thinking seriously about his work and career. This is not to suggest that Brown, who was at the age of 30 when he went there, did not already have any special interests or preferences. The poems contained in his collection *The Storm and Other Poems* (1954), written between 1942 and 1952, clearly indicate that he had by then settled his mind on certain subjects and ideas (especially religious, historical and mythological themes) long before he took up a course at Newbattle Abbey College. His preoccupation with stories from the *Orkneyinga Saga*, Norse legends and, in particular, the accounts of the martyrdom of St. Magnus, had already found an outlet in an early poem, "Prayer to Magnus", published in *The New Shetlander* on 6 October, 1947. This was one of Brown's first attempts at utilising themes which were to become central to his later work. Nevertheless, the time spent at Newbattle allowed him to acquire additional literary skills and the necessary confidence in his potential as a poet. Both the consistent encouragement of Edwin Muir as well as the challenging atmosphere among the students helped to strengthen his poetic outlook and affirm his earlier assumptions about his approach to art, while opening up new horizons. His autobiography confirms this:

> There is no doubt that the influence of Edwin Muir and of those four fellow-students of mine [Archie Hind, Tom Scott, Bob Fletcher, Bill Drysdale] helped to make me a writer. [...] Newbattle stimulated me, and gave me a sense of purpose and direction.[27]

After the college broke up in June 1952 Brown went back to Orkney. Not long after his return he had another attack of tuberculosis, was again hospitalised and had to recuperate at Eastbank Sanatorium in Kirkwall. Although he felt that "everything is as dim and drab as usual"[28] he worked steadily and continued to submit work to *The New Shetlander* and *The Sun*. During that time his continuing contact with Edwin and Willa Muir proved to be supportive. Muir sent him books that he thought would appeal to him; he encouraged his reading of English and European literature and reassured him about his own work.[29] It was not long afterwards, in 1954, that Brown, spurred on by Muir's approval, began to make his mark as a poet. His first collection of poetry *The Storm and Other Poems* was published in the same year. Muir had known these poems from the time when Brown was at Newbattle; he liked them very much and admired their "real natural grace which is so absent from poetry just now

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[27] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing. An Autobiography* (London 1997), p. 93.

[28] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 6/10/1953.

[29] See Muir's letter to GMB on 23/7/1953: "I am sending you two books, a P.E.N. Anthology and a translation of Hofmansthal. Please keep them both and don't think of returning them. [...] I wonder if you are doing any writing, and if that idea of sketches of Orkney life appeals to you", in EULIB, Spec. Col, Gen 767/7.

and which poetry needs so much".[30] Admitting later that "strange as it may seem, I found it very difficult to compose a foreword, I don't know why: it is the only one I have ever written in my life", he contributed a glowing introduction to the book:[31]

> I am glad to be allowed to write this foreword, for I am a great admirer of George Brown's poetry. This is his first published collection, and I hope it will be followed by many more. His main theme in it is Orkney, past and present, and, if only for that reason, this book should be in every Orkney home. But it is as a poet, not only as an Orkney poet, that I admire him. He has the gift of imagination and the gift of words: the poet's endowment. [...] I read them first, along with others, when Mr. Brown was at Newbattle Abbey, and what struck me then was their fresh and spontaneous beauty. Now, after reading them again, I am impressed as well by something which I can only call grace. Grace is what breathes warmth into beauty and tenderness into comedy: it is in a sense the crowning gift, for without it beauty would be cold and comedy would be heartless. Grace is what I find in all these poems.[32]

Muir was extremely pleased to see the publication of Brown's first collection of poetry and he was determined to increase the book's popularity and reputation by sending it to various reviewers and publishers, making use of his contacts. On 19 July, 1954 (after the publication of *The Storm*) he informed Brown who was still confined to Kirkwall Sanatorium:

> It must have given you a great deal of pleasure to see your book come out, and I hope that it will have a real success. I have written to half a dozen people that I know, and sent them copies each, and I hope that it may help to bring the book before the public. [...] Flora tells me that you are very much better and that you expect to be out of hospital this summer. It must have been a very long and very dreary trial to be confined all this time, and it must be a great relief when you do get out.[33]

The book certainly served as a great encouragement to Brown to pursue his literary interests since he returned to Newbattle in the summer of 1956 to prepare himself for entry to an English course at Edinburgh University. Meanwhile, Brown's friendship with Edwin Muir – who had left Newbattle in the summer of 1955 to deliver the Charles Eliot lectures at Harvard (later published as *The Estate of Poetry*) – continued with Muir still offering him encouragement and advice, as well as practical help. By then he was urging Brown into print, and before he left for America he proposed to take some of his poems with him to try to get them published abroad:

> I want to tell you how much I liked the last lot of poetry you sent me, especially the elegy for Thorfinn and the elegy for Allison Tait. I think they are among your best. Would you like me to take some of your poems to America with me? I might rouse some interest and manage to get some of them published. [...] what you have written recently is wonderfully eloquent in the old, right sense. Think of sending me some for America.[34]

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[30] Ibid., letter of Edwin Muir to GMB, 16/12/1953.
[31] Ibid., 17/2/1954.
[32] See foreword to *The Storm and Other Poems* (Kirkwall 1954).
[33] See letters of Edwin Muir, 1951-1958, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 767/7.
[34] Ibid., 15/8/1955.

And he meant what he said; in April 1956 he informed Brown:

> I've taken the liberty of sending a selection of your poems to Mrs. Alice Morris, the literary editor of Harper's Bazaar. I hope you don't mind. [...] I admire these poems of yours more and more the more I read them: you have a feeling for words which I sincerely envy! and the feeling and imagination in the "Elegy", "The Masked House", "The Old Women", "Thorfinn", "Hamnavoe", to take a varied selection, are very moving. The genius is there, my dear George, and I wish you all that it offers you. I still think you should prepare a volume of your best poems up to now.[35]

As a result of Muir's ongoing support Brown's poetry saw publication in America and won its first admirers overseas.

In 1956, when Brown returned to Newbattle he was again ready for a change and intellectual challenge. Writing to Marwick he confessed: "I was in great need of that change, for I was completely worn out, soul, and mind and body."[36] However, when he took up his studies in English at the University of Edinburgh in the October of the same year, the atmosphere, the larger number of students and the speed at which they had to work distressed him after his "edenic" experience at Newbattle. His studies and the getting-used to the new place did not leave him much time to write, which increased his unhappiness. Expressing his feelings he told Marwick:

> Truly I think that the Communists, or the Jehova's Witnesses are right – we are getting near the end of the present set-up. A city that breeds such people is at the edge of a crumbling crag. [...] I'm afraid we have to work here very hard – I had very quickly to forget the old leisurely Newbattle tempo. The mills of knowledge grind ponderously and inexorably in the brain. The trouble is to keep them from grinding down the heart too. [...] And that's the chief complaint I have – I get no time at all to write. It's the old "Scotium extremium" in operation again – forget about sweetness and light, work till you sprout grey hairs. This University should be a place where great winds blow and fall quiet again – actually it's a factory for turning out M.A.s like sausages.[37]

Muir, whose experience of the "fall" on leaving Orkney and going to Glasgow was similar if not more traumatic shared Brown's feelings on modern industrial cities; he replied to Brown:

> I agree with you very much about Edinburgh in general, though there are some civilised people in it too: but there are everywhere, and I'm merely repeating a platitude. It is curious that I felt almost the same thing about Glasgow when I went there first as you do about Edinburgh now, though far more blindly; I wasn't able at the time to explain to myself why I disliked things. I

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[35] See P. H. Butter (ed.), *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, p. 184, 9/4/1956; [In return, Alice Morris, Literary Editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, New York City, replied to GMB on 10/4/1956: "Through the kindness of Mr. Edwin Muir, we have read a group of your fine and moving poems. Our poetry rates are, alas, not generous, but [...] we should be proud to publish these poems. Later, on 19 April, she wrote: "It is wonderful to discover a new poet (at least new to me) [...] In any case, I want to tell you how pleased I am that we have the poems, and to assure you that I will always be deeply interested to consider any further poems you care to submit", in The National Library of Scotland, Spec. Col., Acc10209/4, letters to GMB 1952-1965.]

[36] See letter of GMB, 8/5/1956, in Kirkwall Library Archive, material about E. W. Marwick.

[37] Ibid., letter of 23/10/1956.

> think what disconcerted me was the aggression, the assertiveness, the lack of courtesy, as you call it, a kind of courtesy one had got used to as a natural thing. I'm glad you're meeting the old Newbattle crowd, and it warms my heart to think they talk of the days "before the fall". There was some faint air of Eden about the place then.[38]

Yet Muir also urged him to see the positive side of his time in Edinburgh. Against the background of his own disturbing experience of "exile" and the "fall" from Orkney which had given impetus to much of his vision and his poetry, he reminded Brown that "one sees the place one comes from in a new way when one sees it from a different place, and you may see Orkney with a new eye from Edinburgh."[39]

Muir's support continued throughout Brown's time in Edinburgh. When he prepared a collection of his best poems, Muir commented in 1957:

> I have read your poems several times, and again before I began to write this letter. I am greatly impressed by them: you write better and better, it seems to me, as you go on. I like particularly "That Night in Troy", a splendid poem, both for its imagination and its language, "The Shining Ones", for a sort of dark splendour: "Thorfinn" and "Hamnavoe", which I have read many times before, I like as much as ever after the last reading. I am picking out the greatest ones. But there is none that I don't like: there is some element of delight (that rare quality, and growing rarer and rarer), in them all for me, [...] I feel a vivid sense of delight such as I feel from hardly any of the other poetry that is written now, and not only that but beauty as well. I admire these poems more than I can say. I have been urging you to publish, [...]. Now about the publication. Would you like me to send the poems to the Hogarth Press? [...] And there is a possible other chance, even after that, which I can only indicate now in confidence: please don't mention it to anyone. I have recently been asked by Eyre & Spottiswoode to select and edit a volume of poems by poets who have not been published in book form (this, at my request, included poets who have been published locally: I was thinking of you). The book is to include the work of three poets [...]. You could be published in this book, for I know that I cannot hope to find anyone as good as yourself.[40]

In 1958 he sent a collection of Brown's poems to the Hogarth Press and was very pleased when they were accepted. Brown admitted that "But for him I think I'd never have had the courage to send any of my poems anywhere."[41] He recalls:

> One day in 1958 – being then a mature student at Edinburgh – I trudged wearily up the stone flights of Marchmont Crescent to find a letter for me from the Hogarth Press. I read with delight and amazement that they had accepted a book of my poems. I was amazed because I hadn't submitted a manuscript to them: that had been done, in secrecy and utmost kindness, by Edwin Muir.[42]

Elsewhere he observed that "Myself, I'm quite sure I'd have done little or nothing in the way of getting them published."[43] Although Muir had mentioned in his letter to Brown in December 1957 that he would like to send some of his poems to Hogarth

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[38] Letter of 20/12/1956, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 767/7
[39] Ibid., 8/12/1956.
[40] Letter of 5/12/1957, quoted in Butter (ed.), *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, pp. 193-194.
[41] See GMB, letter to Kulgin Duval, 30/10/1965, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen. 767/7, letters 1951-1958.
[42] See GMB, "The Seven Ages of George Mackay Brown", in *The Scotsman*, 30/8/1986.
[43] Quoted in Alan Bold, *George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh 1974), p. 5.

Press or include them in a poetry book for Eyre & Spottiswoode, it still came as a surprise to Brown when he learned that they accepted his collection of poems – even more so, since he had not played an active part in the submission. Thus, with Muir's help Brown's second book of poems, *Loaves and Fishes*, was published in June 1959, while he was at the end of his third year of study. The book was his first nation-wide publication of a collection of poems. Edwin Muir however never saw it come out. He died on 3 January, 1959. After Edwin Muir's death Willa took over the role of a close friend and adviser with whom Brown could discuss literary as well as personal matters. She was delighted when *Loaves and Fishes* was published and, after having reassured Brown in February of that year that "Edwin had great hopes of you my dear, don't forget that", she later commented about the book:

> I have read and re-read your poems. [...] "Daffodils", I think, is the perfect poem. I do congratulate you. How I wish Edwin could have seen this book! There is a kind of Orkney light about it, and a smell of the sea.[44]

Brown certainly appreciated Willa Muir's friendship, kindness and generosity. However, when asked in an interview in 1984 if she figured much in his acquaintance with Edwin, he merely mentioned that she "sort of guarded him [Edwin] all his life"[45] – whereas this also applied to himself in a way. He corresponded regularly with Willa and shared with her some of his intimate thoughts and personal problems, as their correspondence (1953-1968) clearly indicates. Given Willa Muir's own comment in 1968 that, after Edwin's death, she acted as Brown's "unofficial Public Relations Officer",[46] and also bearing in mind that she was a writer and poet in her own right, the extent of her influence on Brown would perhaps merit closer examination.

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[44] See letters of Willa Muir to GMB, 9/2/1959 and 19/7/1959, in The National Library of Scotland, Acc 4847/2.

[45] See *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 10.

[46] See letters of Willa Muir to GMB, in The National Library of Scotland, 27/7/1968. One of the things she did for Brown was to get Professor Jack Sweeney of Lamont Poetry Library in Harvard interested in Brown's work who liked *Loaves and Fishes* very much. She reassured Brown that "Edwin and I have both recommended you to his attention already". Being practical, Willa urged Brown to overcome his reluctance and get in touch with Sweeney: "I suppose you don't realise that Jack Sweeney has a good deal of influence in the States, and could probably get you a sizeable amount of dollars as a kind of fellowship." Knowing Brown's fearful feelings towards travel and adjusting to new places, she added: "It doesn't mean going to America; the Chapelbrook Foundation, Boston, would subsidize you for a year to stay at home and write good poetry" (Ibid., 30/8/1965).

3. George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir: the one vision?

Besides getting practical help and moral support from Edwin Muir, Brown shared many of his concerns and ideas. Muir's *The Story and the Fable* had a deep impact on Brown. He was able to relate his own thoughts to those of Edwin Muir who confirmed his earlier feelings about life and art. N. D. Garriock is right in emphasising the book's influence when he points out that it might have been

> one [...] influence without which Brown's work would have remained parochial and of little interest to readers outside of Scotland. [...] In *The Story and the Fable* Brown discovered an aesthetic doctrine which explained and gave order to much which troubled him.[47]

Muir's autobiography was a stimulus for Brown which ought not to be underestimated. It provided him with the "missing links" in his personal and artistic outlook and helped him formulate a vision to which he had been naturally drawn since his adolescence.[48] The book served as a means of confirming ideas that he had long been contemplating. However, while appreciating the centrality of Muir it would be wrong to ignore Brown's already established leanings towards religion and his readings of other twentieth-century writers which he was to accommodate in the process of "sorting out important matters from trivial matters".[49]

Brown was well read in the works of such writers and poets as Mann, Forster, Auden, Pound, and Lawrence and he very much admired the poetry of Eliot. In 1946 he wrote to Marwick about Eliot's "Four Quartets": "Did you enjoy reading 'The Quartets'? Take your time about reading them as I have them almost by heart."[50] In addition to Eliot's "Four Quartets" John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* had shaken Brown "to the core" and provided him with the "magnificent devastating logic" of the Christian faith at a time of personal suffering which followed his brother's death.[51] Moreover, Brown had been aware for a long time that "By nature I am interested in religion"[52] which suggests that – due to his Christian beliefs – his work, even without Muir's literary influence, would not have "remained parochial", unless one thinks of Christianity and religious poetry as "parochial" and narrowing. In addition to his interest in religion which provided him with a groundwork for his thoughts and ideas, literary evidence as well as Brown's correspondence suggest that as early as 1946 he had been experimenting with a form of composition which he

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[47] See N. D. Garriock, "Juvenilia to *Loaves and Fishes*", in *Chapman* 60 (April 1990), p. 3.
[48] Especially when one bears in mind Brown's statement that "the same sort of idea was always there".
[49] See GMB, "Writer's Shop", in *Chapman* 16 (1976), p. 23.
[50] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 30/12/1946, Kirkwall Archive.
[51] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 26/4/1947, Ibid.; letter written shortly "after my brother had gone". According to Brown's biographer Maggie Ferguson, one of Brown's brothers committed suicide in 1947.
[52] See letter to E. W. Marwick, no date attached, most certainly written in 1947.

called "Prose Poem", a form of writing which he thought was "more akin to musical form than to poetry". Writing to Ernest Marwick he mentioned his composition *Swan's Way* of which the first section, "Journey to Avilion" is the story of King Arthur's voyage to Avilion, inspired by Tennyson's *Morte D'Arthur* and fused with an account of events in a trip to Rackwick on Hoy which he made in the early summer of that year. In this modern variant of the Morte D'Arthur legend Brown attempted to create a timeless quality by emphasising that "the time and place do not matter, seeing that the events narrated have a timeless significance". To strengthen this impression all the names in that long poem are classical, but the overall theme has a contemporary relevance. Thus, Brown alludes to "Hitler's Germany after the death and defeat of Hitler" or any place "after any great war in history when heroic leaders fell after a brief noon-day of splendour". He was anxious to underline the universal and timeless significance of his retelling of the old story: "The whole prose poem is a meditation on leadership, defeat, lost glory."[53] Thus, to assume that Brown's vision as displayed in his early work – which was well on its way in 1946, a year after Brown had read *The Story and the Fable* – could be a mere imitation of Muir's ideas would be misleading. Rather, it points to some pre-existing natural affinities that were intensified later by Muir's personal and literary influence.

[53] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 24/10/1946.

3.1 Edwin Muir's *The Story and the Fable*

In *The Story and the Fable* and in a letter written at the time of its composition, Edwin Muir posed a question which clarified his concern. His question was of the very nature of man: "to find out what a human being is in this extraordinary age which depersonalises everything".[54] By an act of memory and imagination he described his childhood in Orkney as both a real place and as his Eden before the "fall" on leaving Orkney. Attempting to place his life into his personal past, he set out to take the journey back to the time of his childhood in a pre-industrial Orkney and, symbolically, to the innocent state of childhood. As to why, Muir later explained: "we can feel but we cannot see life whole until it has been placed in some kind of past where it discovers its true shape."[55] The key to this process by which he tried to re-discover parts of that innocent state of childhood where we still feel "whole" was the ability to remember. In an extract of his diary he emphasised that "we begin to die when we stop remembering".[56] The importance to Muir of the ability to summon up the past, which Brown too recognised as one of the central tasks of any poet, is further explained by him in a radio broadcast on Muir in 1969:

> Before writing that book his past must have been pretty shapeless and dark and meaningless. In *The Story and the Fable*, by a pure cold act of memory, he found out what was really important in his life, that is, the innocence and the vision he had in his infancy in Orkney. He found that he still remembered it. He knew he must hold on to it, whatever happened.[57]

Further to his belief in the past as being meaningful for our understanding of the present, Muir conceived of life as both the story of our everyday lives and an eternal underlying fable which is at its source. The Story is the life of any individual, but the Fable is that which every life seeks, more or less imperfectly, to realise, to reflect, to embody. He thought that what we perceive as everyday stories of our lives or as historical facts are, in a platonist sense, copies of eternal ideals, or re-enactments of the Fable. On Muir's understanding of the Story and the Fable Brown commented: "the modern times in which he was caught up he sees rather as only one manifestation of the abiding fable."[58]

The view that "the life of every man is an endlessly repeated performance of the life of man" set Muir on a quest for the underlying patterns inherent in the Fable, momentarily shining through the story of each individual life:

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[54] See P. H. Butter, *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, p. 100.
[55] See Edwin Muir, *Essays on Literature and Society* (London 1949), p. 225.
[56] See E. Muir, "Extracts from Diaries"(15/5/1958), in *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh 1993), p. 294.
[57] See transcript of a radio broadcast in 1969, in Orkney Archives, D 31/31/3/2, quoted in George Marshall, *In a distant Isle. The Orkney Background of Edwin Muir* (Edinburgh 1987), p. 6
[58] See GMB (ed.), *Edwin Muir. Selected Prose*, p. 3.

> There are times in every man's life when he seems to become for a little while a part of the fable, and to be recapitulating some legendary drama which, as it has recurred a countless number of times in time, is ageless. The realization of the Fall is one of those events, and the purifications which happen in one's life belong to them too.[59]

In order to recover the underlying fable, or to get a glimpse of the innocence that man has lost, a certain quality of perception is needed. This perception or vision can either be a dream-vision originating in the unconscious or the innocent and immediate vision of childhood. In his autobiography Muir describes how he got a sense of immortality based on a feeling of the endurance and permanence of things in moments of contemplation: "when I am unconscious of my body [...] and, because self-forgetfulness is most complete then, in dreams and day-dreams".[60] The perception of something timeless is compared to the innocence and naiveté of childhood when one has not yet developed a feeling for time or the past. Both, the child's way of seeing and man's "inseeing" into the beginnings (the childhood) of the human race is therefore central to Muir's poetry. It is the child's eye and – subsequently, after the "tragi-comedy" of youth ("The Myth") – the poetic imagination which helps to keep open the gates of vision that grant us, if only fragmentarily, a perspective of the wholeness of human life.

These insights of Muir gave order to Brown's own thoughts. He shared Muir's inclination towards platonist thought and Jungian theories of the unconscious and his ideas about archetypes:

> We are said to experience the whole history of the human race in our brief womb-time; [...] We arrive on the scene with a vast heritage of experience: the hunt, the battle, the voyage, the settlement, defeat and triumph and reconciliation; all our ancestors are present in us. The archetypes are set, that make us human.[61]

Similarly, in *Magnus*, Brown describes the human condition and the sources of art in Muiresque terms of the Story and the Fable, accentuating their archetypal and psychological patterns:

> Events are never the same, [...] but there are constants in human nature, and constants in the human situation, and [...] men in similar circumstances will behave roughly in the same fashion. Poetry, art, music thrive on these constants. They gather into themselves a huge scattered diversity of experience and reduce them to patterns; so that, for example, in a poem all voyages – past, present, and future – become The Voyage, and all battles The Battle, all feasts The Feast. This is to look at those events of time which resemble one another yet are never quite the same, in a symbolical way.[62]

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[59] See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, p. 105.
[60] Ibid., p. 45.
[61] See GMB, "An Autobiographical Essay", in *As I remember*, p. 19.
[62] See GMB, *Magnus* (Edinburgh 1998), pp. 129-130.

The urgency with which Muir tried to outline the Fable and the "constants in human nature" strengthened Brown's own thoughts about the true task of poetry and the poet: to keep those "early sources pure in the materialistic rubbishy world of the twentieth century".[63] Thus inspired by Muir Brown defined his task as a poet:

> [to] "keep the sources pure" [and to] describe the vision by which people live, what Edwin Muir called their Fable.[64]

That he made this aesthetic doctrine his own is also indicated when he asserts in *An Orkney Tapestry* that the book was meant to take the stand with those poets who have been more interested in essences. He explains: "I am interested in facts only, as they tend and gesture like birds and grass and waves in 'the gale of life'."[65] Speaking with Muir he further points out that in his attempt to create a profile of Orkney, he was not interested in the present but in what has been perpetually relevant since the beginning of time: "I lean my cheek from eternity...".[66]

Seen against the background of *The Story and the Fable* it is clear which direction Brown intended to go aesthetically when claiming that his major concern was not with the "facts of our history – what Edwin Muir called the Story"[67] but rather with essences whose patterns were to be laid bare by an act of imagination, memory and by "the oracular tongue of fable"[68] which, for Brown, was poetry that at its best has prophetic and visionary qualities.[69] However, the distinction that Muir made between the Story and the Fable was not made in order to dismiss the story as a mere shadow thrown against a wall, or to say that the record of actual events (facts of history) is less significant than the mythical pattern that he discerned behind them, but rather to render both more meaningful. Hence Muir would "try to fit that world to this,/ The hidden to the visible play,/ Would have them both, would nothing miss".[70] This double view of life into which everything is incorporated, that which is familiar but at the same time seems to be gathered into some mysterious ceremony and thus becomes transformed into something extraordinary or fabulous is very marked in

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[63] See GMB, in *The Orcadian*, 15/12/1966.
[64] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry* (London 1973), pp. 1-2.
[65] Ibid., p. 2.
[66] Ibid., p. 2, quote from Edwin Muir's *The Story and the Fable* (1940): "I lean my cheek from eternity for Time to slap", p. 241 (diaries).
[67] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 2.
[68] See GMB, introduction to *Edwin Muir. Selected Prose*, p. 3.
[69] For more on visionary poetry see GMB on Muir in his essay "The double aspect", in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen, 1866/5: the function of visionary poetry is to "show us the familiar ground of our living from a new and surprising angle, as it is viewed perhaps by immortal spirits".
[70] See "Day and Night", in Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems* (London 1984), p. 240. All following quotations of Edwin's Muir's poems are from this edition. (*CP*)

Muir's poetry. In his book, *Scottish Journey* (1935), he made a remark that further clarifies this:

> I thought that all our lives are bounded by a similar horizon, which is at once familiar to us and beyond our knowledge, and that it is against this indistinct barrier that our imaginings pile themselves up, building for all of us a fabulous world. [...] I had a sense stronger than ever before of the double aspect of everything.[71]

Brown elucidates this habit of perception in an essay on "Edwin Muir's Poetry: The double aspect", ultimately summing up a poetic vision and technique which was to become characteristic of much of his own writing:

> Out of that clash between innocence and experience, between the pastoral and the industrial, between the legendary and the topical, his poems are minted – currency of a haunting "double aspect".[72]

This dual perception of life, later developed into the distinction of the Story and the Fable, implies that there is something fabulous behind every ordinary event or person. This is shared by Brown when he writes in *An Orkney Tapestry* that

> The facts of our history – what Edwin Muir called The Story – are there. But often it seems that history is only the forging [...] of a mask [...]. Underneath, the true face dreams on, and The Fable is repeated over and over again.[73]

Brown not only embraced Muir's distinction of the Story and the Fable but also the belief that the Fable is repeated over and over again, implying that there is an eternal recurrence or a perpetual re-enactment of events and characters. The method used in Brown's *Fishermen with Ploughs* where he traced the history of the characters over many generations shows his concern with the underlying Fable. In a prefatory note to the book he points out that "essentially their lives were unchanged; the same people appear and reappear through many generations". Such a repetition of characters and events, a feeling of "continuity ruled by repetition" as a fundamental pattern of life, is striking in Brown and became even more pronounced in his later work. In "Brodgar Poems" (1992), he voices the same idea as in his early collections of poetry: "People in AD 2000 are essentially the same as the stone-breakers and horizon-breakers of 3000 BC."[74] This helps explain why his poems and stories are populated with the same kind of characters, engaged in basic human dramas: tinkers, drunkards, poets, story-tellers, beachcombers, shopkeepers, fishermen, crofters, women (waiting at the shore); fishing, ploughing, birth, love and death. In "Themes" Brown sums up this poetic conspectus at which he arrived at the time of his first major publication *Loaves*

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[71] See Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey* (Edinburgh 1979), p. 218.
[72] See GMB, "Edwin Muir's Poetry: The double aspect", MS, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen, 1866/5,
[73] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 2.
[74] See GMB, *Selected Poems 1954-1992* (London 1996), p. 166.

and Fishes (1959).[75] The themes and issues mentioned there remained fundamental throughout his work and career. Moreover, inspired by the biblical parable of the sower and the seed, for Brown the human drama did not stop with death; through rebirth and return (symbolised in the "Odyssean corn returning") it was made timeless:

> Tinker themes cry through
> The closes of my breath –
> Straw and tapestry shaken
> With keenings of love and birth;
> Odyssean corn returning
> Across furrows of death;
> Women scanning the sea;
> Ploughmen wounding the earth. ("Themes", *LaF*, p. 16)

An examination of the ideas that were fundamental to the two poets shows that Muir's vision is central to a better understanding and an evaluation of Brown's work. This however, and the extent to which *The Story and the Fable* informed Brown's thoughts on life and poetry at a time when he was looking for meaning, order and direction both personally and artistically, has been underestimated by Brown scholars. The insights Brown gained through his acquaintance with Muir's ideas about the human situation, in conjunction with his religious readings and beliefs, illuminated the whole of life for him and provided him with a distinct direction. To criticise him for being repetitive in his use of themes or characters or for being predictable in his employment of imagery, would be to deny him the freedom to apply what he had discovered as being germane to his artistic and spiritual vision. He had arrived at a point where his beliefs became an integral part of his literary outlook.[76] He absorbed Muir's universal vision and the idea of a "recurrence of pattern-within-flux",[77] but at the same time his poetic and religious imagination nourished each other, culminating in the eucharistic ritual of Christ's passion and resurrection; an image that embodies the religious nature of the Fable and is central to his work and thought. The often indirect criticism Brown earned for pointing out the patterns rather than the "flux" of modern life puts him in a similar position as Muir whose poetry in its time was not particularly fashionable. Muir was not an innovator in the English poetic tradition and his work was not felt to be part of the main thrust of literary modernism in the early decades of the century to revitalise Scottish writing. Margery McCulloch thinks that "Muir has on the whole been pushed to the periphery in accounts of early twentieth-century literature in English,

[75] See GMB, *Loaves and Fishes*, p. 16.
[76] Presumably Brown was also aware of Muir's late rapprochement to Catholicism as manifested in the poetry.
[77] See GMB, *Magnus*, p. 131.

most probably as a consequence of his stylistic apartness from modernist influences."[78] Muir himself thought that when he started writing poetry (at the age of 35) he was too old to submit himself to contemporary influences. Brown's rating among modern Scottish poets and writers has also been ambiguous, partly because of the perceived lack of innovation in style, language and subject matter. Significantly, Willa Muir too felt that Edwin and Brown, being "Romantic poets" rather than "modern poets" were naturally running the risk of being called "old-fashioned" due to their romantic, religious and holistic preoccupations. In 1961 she wrote to Brown, who was distressed about some of the reactions to his work:

> Romantic poets, you will be interested to hear are out of date, if not dead (that's Edwin and you, for instance). It's no longer done to look inside yourself and make sense of what you find.[79]

Her witty reply to another of Brown's letters in which she remarks about the literary climate in general and on Muir and Brown's literary reception in particular, is still as challenging today as it was then:

> Alas, I don't know what you should do with your poems. Romantic poetry, as far as Cambridge is concerned is "out", but if it comes again, as it well may, your Norse heroes may stand a chance. I fear that Edwin's writings are looked upon by the brashes and young critics as out of date too. [...] I don't believe it is either a wide or a deep stream [...] but so far as it goes it is reaching out for greater self-consciousness *intellectually* formulated, in an objective un-romantic tone, using if necessary what are called four-letter words. If you were to write a poem about bums – I mean real hurdies, bottoms – with implicit puns to express their philosophic importance, you would be acclaimed, I think. But romantic yearnings or admirations – no.[80]

That Muir and Brown in their own time were confronted with similar criticism, and the fact that Willa Muir also thought of the two men as "romantic poets" further underlines their affinity.

Among the works that show Brown's likeness to Muir, displaying his earliest attempts at applying Muir's universal vision are several poems written and published in the late 1940s as well as poems included in *The Storm* (1954). Looking at some of these early poems helps to demonstrate how much Brown's inspiration owed to the work and thought of Muir and to what extent he made his influence his own while gradually developing his distinctive voice (as for instance in his style and the use of Norse myth and Christian dogma). In "Song: Further than Hoy" (*The Storm*) Brown suggests that something fabulous, a force or mystery which is deeper, more comprehensive and more meaningful than our own lives, exists, but cannot be grasped. In the light of this mystery, the true pattern which we perceive as being

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[78] See M. McCulloch, introduction to *Edwin Muir. Poet, Critic, Novelist* (Edinburgh 1993).
[79] See letter of Willa Muir to GMB, 29/8/1961, in The National Library of Scotland, Spec. Col., Acc 4847/2.
[80] Ibid., 1/8/1962.

important and which we think of as being central to our lives, such as our homeland, things we see and relate to as belonging to it (places, customs, traditions, songs and stories, man-made history and historical facts) – such things become secondary; they represent only single aspects of our lives. Often they obscure our thoughts and the ability to discern that what we value is not the measure of all things, but that:

> Further than Hoy
> the mermaids whisper [...]
>
> Further than history
> the legends thicken [...]
>
> Further than fame
> are fleas and visions,
> the hermit's cave
> under the mountain
>
> Further than song
> the hushed awakening
> of country children
> the harp unstroked
>
> Further than death
> your feet will come
> to the forest, black forest
> where Love walks, alone. ("Song: Further than Hoy", *SP*, p. 5)

Even ordinary people, tramps and outsiders can have insights into life and the true nature of things; in "The Beachcomber", one of Brown's later poems, the beachcomber is the outsider to respected society, asking: "What's Heaven? A sea chest with a thousand gold coins"; he suggests that it is the treasures of the imagination and the belief in the impossible or miraculous that can be more precious than the actual event which might never happen.[81] Brown's later approach to such outsider-figures like Ikey, the beachcomber, the tramp or the tinker is anticipated in many poems already included in *The Storm*. What is also striking in Brown's poem "Song: Further than Hoy" is his attempt to come to terms with his Christian approach to Muir's perception of life as the Story and its Fable and his belief in resurrection. In the poem Brown suggests that even behind that force which seems to end our lives there is a beyond, a place of love: "Further than death/ your feet will come/ to the forest,/ where love walks, alone." That he separates the word "alone" with a comma from the rest of the sentence indicates that to be, after death, in the forest where Love walks, is to have travelled back to the Christian Fable of a life in Eden, the beginnings where only Love and the Good reigns. However, the end of the poem is ambiguous; why Brown describes that forest as a "black forest" is not clear. Possibly "black" implies that, although we feel that there is the Fable, a beyond, or even

[81] See GMB, *Fishermen with Ploughs* (London 1971), p. 63.

though we believe in an afterlife, any real knowledge of it or any reassurance of what it could be like evades our imagination and remains a mystery; all the images we yield of it and all the myths and stories we create around it cannot capture its true nature; the forest of Love remains, for the time being, a "black forest". Again, this is reminiscent of Muir whose poetry embodies the sadness of being unable to attain the ultimate vision of the Fable and the mystery behind our lives for more than a moment (as in "The Return"). Many of Muir's poems were created out of the tension between the knowledge that a man has the ability to recover the Fable and gain insight into it, and the realisation that a full understanding of life which would grant us a feeling of wholeness is yet largely impossible. Something will always remain inaccessible, obscured and unexplained. However, considering that Brown had been looking for a suitable outlet for his religious belief and his Christianity since his adolescence – before he finally converted to Catholicism in 1961 – it is not surprising that the mystery behind our lives is in the last analysis a matter of faith and belief. Thus, Brown's image of the "black" forest, reminiscent of Muir's "sweet and terrible labyrinth" as it is, would yet be a "friendly" one, recalling Muir's "old and heavy and long-leaved trees that watch/ [...] in *friendly darkness*".[82]

Another of Brown's early poems, "The Exile", – first published in *The New Shetlander* in 1949 and later included in *The Storm* – depicts major themes of Muir's.[83] One of those is the preoccupation with the fall, man's expulsion from Eden, the perceived impossibility of a return and man's condition as an exile. The idea of exile was an important element in Muir's belief in the "fall", since Eden was not only a state of being in his view, but also a place; the "fall" exemplified the expulsion from Eden, the exclusion from that place. "The Exile" reflects Brown's closeness to Muir's ideas and a belief in patterns and archetypes not just by the choice of its title. The pattern Brown refers to is Man's fall from grace, his exclusion from Eden; the archetype is Adam, the first "exile" whose actions and fate are repeated, symbolically, in each individual life, childhood being the innocent state linked to Eden.[84] The imagery in the poem and the atmosphere created by Brown is very reminiscent of Muir and creates a similar feeling of being "[h]aunted by guilt and innocence"[85] but also with a feeling of inevitability:

> So, blinded with Love
> He tried to blunder
> Out of that field
> Of floods and thunder.

[82] See Edwin Muir, "The Return", in *Collected Poems*, p. 167; my italics.
[83] See *The New Shetlander* 19 (November – December 1949), p. 53.
[84] See Edwin Muir, "Adam's Dream", in *Collected Poems*, p. 210.
[85] See Edwin Muir, "Outside Eden", ibid., p. 212,

The frontiers were closed.
At every gate
The sworded pitiless
Angels wait.

There is no retreat.
The path mounts higher
And every summit
Fringed with fire.

The night is blind,
Dark winds, dark rains:
[...]

And he would not turn,
Though the further side
Dowered his days
With fame and pride.
[...]

The frontiers sealed;
His foot on the stone;
And low in the East
The gash of dawn. ("The Exile", *SP*, p. 3)

The unnamed "he", the feeling of being trapped with no going back, the theme of the restricted way, the symbolism of sealed frontiers and gates being guarded by "sworded pitiless Angels" and the exile who walks "in the menacing air", all help to evoke the general atmosphere of a Muir-poem where roads tend to run in a maze or are winding up a mountain with the way always leading on.[86] Close to Muir's vision, the archetypal figure of the exile alludes to Adam's expulsion from Eden but is generally about man's fall from grace and innocence into experience and a life dominated by fame and pride. Images of the "threshold stone/ mired with earth and blood", and man's waking sense of inquiry, knowledge and experience, symbolised by "the other side", are also to be found in Brown's poem: "The frontiers sealed;/ His foot on the stone;/ And low in the East/ The gash of dawn". The "gash of dawn" encapsulates both, the sense of a dawning consciousness of one's own freedom and one's self, but at the same time it exposes the pain and suffering caused by this fissure between innocence and experience, home and exile. The evocation of paths mounting higher and the summit being fringed with fire also echoes Muir's imagery: "at the very frontier line,/ Beyond the region of desire,/ there runs a wall of towering flame:/ The battle is there of blood and fire/"[87], where he meditates on a vision he had of a world where everything was in its place, a world lost since Eden locked its gates. Pondering about his vision Muir wrote:

[86] See "The Way", ibid., p. 166.
[87] See Edwin Muir, "The Escape", in ibid., pp. 126-128; and "The Transfiguration", pp. 198-199.

> Was it a vision?
> Or did we see that day the unseeable
> One glory of the everlasting world
> Perpetually at work, though never seen
> Since Eden locked the gate that's everywhere
> And nowhere? Was the change in us alone,
> And the enormous earth still left forlorn,
> An exile or a prisoner? ("The Transfiguration", *CP*, p. 199)

Robert Rendall, poet and friend of Brown's shared the impression that "The Exile" is reminiscent of Muir. Commenting on the poem he wrote to Brown in 1949:

> Then in the recent "New Shetlander" I liked your poem written after the manner of Edwin Muir. You have affinities, and though this poem certainly recalls Edwin Muir at his best [...] it is something to have done it so effectively. Your own particular idiom will follow when you have explored the new country.[88]

"The Spinning Woman" also shows Brown's likeness to Muir.[89] In the "Author's Interpretation of His Poem" he starts with the observation that "Though poetry changes its fashions with every age, its few themes never vary." Then he goes on to explain that in the poem, a great hero and leader is being welcomed back to his capital where everybody is out on the street to greet him. Asking the rhetorical question "who is the hero?" he suggests that it might be Napoleon, [...] Claudius, or Hitler, before he dramatically reveals: "actually he is all of them and some others".[90] The vision that inspired this early poetic attempt in the late 1940s concurs with Muir's belief that "There is a continuity ruled by repetition".[91] Therefore, the same kind of characters appear again and again throughout time.

In "The Old Women" too, Brown followed Muir's precept by stressing the eternal Fable behind the everyday story.[92] The wailing women that Brown depicts are real Orkney pier-head gossipers, lamenting over the drowning of a young fisherman; at the same time, however, recalling Muir's simultaneous vision of past and present the "undersong of terrible holy joy" that these women weave into their moans transforms them into characters that appear and re-appear as part of the continuing drama of life and death. They weep not only for the dead fisherman or their sons and husbands, but for Everyman. The oxymoron in "terrible holy joy" might, from Brown's point of view, be understood as the joy that the Christian belief in God and the hope for the fisherman's resurrection can provide; yet in the end, on a more

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[88] See letters to GMB, in The National Library of Scotland, Spec. Col., Acc 4847/1.
[89] Poem first published in *The New Shetlander* 18 (October 1949), p. 11 and 16.
[90] Ibid., p. 11.
[91] Muir elaborated on this idea in *Essays on Literature and Society* (London 1965), p. 226; see also *An Autobiography* where he mentions the recapitulation of "a drama which, as it has recurred a countless number of times in time, is ageless" (p. 105).
[92] See GMB, *Loaves and Fishes*, p. 9.

human level, it goes hand in hand with the grief and pain that (innocent) suffering and death can cause. That the old women "frown on every kind of merriment" and are described as "old hags" suggests Brown's criticism of a narrow-minded Calvinist belief in goodness and worthiness, which is often far from real humanity or compassion. By implying however, that these women echo the women of Jerusalem who mourn over Christ's body, Brown created a bigger, fabulous context against which the ordinary event of a death receives an almost numinous meaning. This observation gains validity with respect to Muir's vision. However, the crux of the poem, the oxymoron in "terrible holy joy" is all Brown's and expresses both the misery and the joy that the Christian faith involves. Death and suffering, although made beautiful by the prospect of redemption and resurrection and its symbolic meaning as a repetition of Christ's passion still remain deep and devastating mysteries. Yet, the revelation of wisdom greater than one's own makes the unbearable bearable. Brown's work is marked by his grappling with the often painful logic of his faith while accepting unconditionally and at times heroically life in all its aspects. In his early work, and later, in the process of establishing for himself a more coherent Christian framework, he displays an ability to struggle creatively with the mystery of faith against the background of suffering. The acceptance of loss is a recurrent theme. Whether drunkards, prostitutes or well-liked "sober boys", pain and suffering do not spare youth or beauty. Muir's observation that "suffering is affirmed without a simultaneous affirmation of personality, against whatever is reasonable, controlled or formed, against human power and human freedom"[93] describes Brown's approach to life. Anticipated in "The Old Women" is another central theme of his later work. "Stations of the Cross: Veronica", read in conjunction with "The Old Women" shows the extent to which Brown made the vision he applied in the earlier poem his own when he clarifies the symbolic meaning of the wailing women:

> There is weeping along the road.
> The town women
> Think of their sons, *all the Sorrows of Man.* (*FaL*, p. 57; my italics)

Elsewhere, in "Gregory Hero", first published in *The New Shetlander* in 1949 (vol. 18) and later substantially rewritten for *Loaves and Fishes*, Brown successfully applied Muir's universal vision and his aesthetic belief in the ordinary event and character that yields the fabulous and extraordinary. The poem imbues the death of an ordinary sailor with the language and imagery of some legendary heroic figure. While, in the first stanza, we are told that "he *was*/ A Viking ship, a white stallion", the last line of the poem with its changing tense from "was" to "is", suggests that

[93] See Edwin Muir, "The Affirmation of Suffering", in *Latitudes* (New York 1924), p. 171.

although he is dead, his actions live on in the actions of all men. He becomes an archetype, "The Sailor": "It's Gregory pursues you round the world."[94] The poem "The Shining Ones"[95] also shows Muir's influence in that it establishes an enigmatic and Kafkaesque narrative – something that Muir referred to as its "dark splendour".[96]

[94] See GMB, *Loaves and Fishes*, p. 17.
[95] Ibid., p. 41.
[96] See Butter, *Edwin Muir. Selected Letters*, p. 194.

3.2 "The Journey back"

Another point of similarity between Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown is their strong sense of identification with their forebears and the past. P. H. Butter has argued that poets such as Muir and Brown who were brought up in contact with an older culture and then had to confront the modern world were naturally preoccupied with time and the past "in order to find a pattern in the shifting present".[97] Muir's statement that we cannot see life whole unless it is placed into the past where it discovers its deeper meaning is confirmed by Brown when he writes in *An Orkney Tapestry* that "contemporary Orkney, cut off from the story of its past is meaningless."[98] The criticism that there is in Brown's writing an absence of the "modern world", even a marked dislike of it, overlooks the fact that it was not out of a reverence for the past that his work was created, but that it was precisely the concern about the modern world that challenged Brown into writing. Simultaneously speaking for himself as well as for Muir, he states in his autobiography that: "It is the modern world that provoked Edwin Muir and me into poetry."[99] Seen in this light the perceived temporal remoteness of his writing and the demand that he should write about more contemporary issues suggests a misunderstanding of the impetus behind his work. As with Muir, whose work came to be fully respected only years after his death, Brown's strength and contemporaneity was bound up with his ability to deal with present-day issues by identifying their essence and treat them on a symbolic, universal and timeless level, where they discover their meaning against a greater and, in Brown's case, an increasingly Catholic background. The vexed question of Brown's "modernity" and of how meaningful his work is for our time could be answered, at least partly, by taking his own comments more seriously. In an interview in 1992 for instance he made a crucial point by explaining that

> the contemporary part of my poetry isn't set in contemporary Orkney at all, in which I find very little that is poetic. [...] It's always seen in the 1920s or 1930s; pre-second World War, [...] because then everything was vivid and alive.[100]

For Brown, time and the past were central ideas and preoccupations. Like Muir, he moved back in time through the generations in order to contrast an older man's and a child's way of seeing the world, juxtaposing experience and innocence, contemporary and universal truths. This vision, born out of the perception of the opposition between the modern and the pre-modern world was what Brown recognised as the

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[97] See Butter, "George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir", *Yearbook of English Studies* 17, p. 16.
[98] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 19.
[99] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 166.
[100] See C. Nicholson, "Unlocking Time's Labyrinth. GMB", (interview with GMB), in *Poem, Purpose, Place. Shaping Identity in Contemporary Scottish Verse* (Edinburgh 1992), pp. 96-113.

strength of Muir's poetry: "Without the contrast, he would have been a different kind of poet, and a lesser one."[101] In a similar way this is true for much of Brown's work too.

The fissure in Muir caused by his traumatic transition from his childhood in Orkney to a harsh and tragic adolescence in Glasgow, enabling him to apply his characteristic "double vision" to his poetry and contemplate on a mythic and often religious level such antitheses as innocence and experience, Eden and the "fall" or good and evil, was greater than Brown's sense of change and loss. Brown's poetry does not involve the same kind of personal stress and suffering as Muir's does; yet he shared something of Muir's sensibility in that he was highly responsive to the social and psychological effects of progress and change and tried to delineate archetypal patterns and constants in order to save what he regarded as crucial for humanity. Though identifying with Muir he was aware that compared to him "I hadn't experienced such wreckages in my life". Yet, the background of an age shaken by two world wars and constant nuclear threat made Brown sensitive to "the slow steepings and rottings of the new age". He adds that because "150 years ago, [...] the people lived close to the springs of poetry [...] I draw any art I have from great-grandparents, or further back."[102] By relating to earlier ages Brown followed Muir's advice in "The Journey Back": "Seek the beginnings, learn from whence you came". Still, both poets had their own way of taking the journey back. Muir ventured deep and far back into the racial memory and the beginning of the human race whereas most of Brown's poems have a much narrower range in time and often deal with pagan or early Christian times, frequently dealing with Norse themes based on the *Orkneyinga Saga*. P. H. Butter confirms this by pointing out that Muir frequently explored the beginning, wondering about the question of what it was like "Then" and that Brown's journey back was to a greater extent than Muir's a journey into actual history, elevated through myth.[103] This is true for most of Brown's poems, though there are works where he imagines the dawn of time:

> In the first darkness, a star bled.
> The war of cloud and summit, other wounds.
> Hills cupped their hands
> And the rain shone over knuckles of rock and dropped to
> the sources. ("Carol", *SP*, p. 42)

Generally however, and this was Brown's own impression too, his approach to the past differed from Muir's:

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[101] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 166.
[102] Ibid., p. 167.
[103] See P. H. Butter, "Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown", p. 20.

> no two kinds of poetry could be more different. Muir adventures deep and far into the racial memory, and the treasures of image and symbol he brings back are steeped in the purity and light and tranquility of the beginning. My poems have a much narrower range in time – a thousand years maybe – and they celebrate as best they can "whatever is begotten, born, or dies" [...] until they stop with memories of my father and his letters and tailor's shears.[104]

Although his somewhat categorical assertion that "no two kinds of poetry could be more different" seems odd in the light of my earlier discussion or many of Brown's own comments and thus ought to be treated cautiously, it is safe to assume that both to him and to Muir it was the journeying back that mattered. Brown often voiced his conviction that what Muir and other twentieth-century Orkney writers did by journeying back and creatively dealing with the past was, partly, to fill in gaps in Orkney literature, replenishing, out of their imagination the "vacant storehouse".[105] The great gap that Brown perceived in Orkney literature roughly between the Reformation and his own time, caused by the squandering of the vast treasury of stories and ballads which are now lost, had to be filled. Therefore, he felt that poets, writers and artists had to partake in the re-creation of the past. Identifying with other northern writers, he believed that he too was one of the successors of those forgotten poets who carved the ancient stones. He thought that he and other twentieth-century writers belonged to a long line of writers who kept alive the ongoing tradition of story-telling and narrative. By taking the journey back through the centuries Brown contributed to this process, defining himself as a twentieth-century bard whose task was to maintain for the present and the future a sense of unity and order by being a rememberer of those stories through which the Fable, or "the vision by which people live" shines and by celebrating what he held to be enduring. Accordingly, Brown stated in 1969 that he was taking his journey back in order to get to his own roots, but also in order to fill in gaps and re-invent parts of the lost Story as his-story, lest people forget their heritage. This coincides with Muir's belief in the social and cultural importance of the artist as a rememberer, but also with his own view that it is the artist's task to create "a place of order, a place of remembrance and a place of vision [...] in order to have things made simple and meaningful once more".[106] This approach to the past, the attempt "to fill in a part of this blank placing my stories here and there through the silent centuries"[107] was Brown's chosen artistic stance. However, his adopted role as the living memory of a community was felt to be symptomatic of an artistic immaturity deriving from an "Arcadia-obsession", as Alan MacGillivray argues in a review of *A Spell for Green Corn*:

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[104] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 165-166.
[105] See GMB, "My County", in *Scottish Field* (July 1986), p. 58.
[106] See GMB, "Writer's Shop", in *Chapman* 16, vol. 4, no. 4 (1976), p. 21.
[107] See GMB in "The Pier Head", Script of a TV-sequence in 1969, EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1866/12.

> Writers about a particular locality seem to be especially prone to this Arcadia-obsession, and the shedding of it would be a welcome sign of maturity. The greatest writers have always been those who accepted their age and faced it squarely, rather than turning their backs on it and spitting, however artistically, over their shoulders.[108]

Brown's tendency to set most of his stories at a distance from the present is neither a sign of immaturity nor is it an escape from the complexities of his own age. On the contrary, he saw himself as an intermediary between past and present whose task was to "relate the legend (what Edwin Muir called "the fable") to this age of television, uranium, and planet-flight".[109] Brown may be considered conservative or traditional in that he sensed and celebrated what has been lost since the time of pre-industrial life; however, his fascination with earlier generations and their lives was closely bound up with his attentiveness to disappearing patterns of existence which, to him, were meaningful for the present; – a phenomenon that can be explained in Muir's terms when he quotes Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "great imagination is always conservative".[110] Attempting to further explain his interest in the past Brown used an image:

> Sometimes I see my task, as poet and story-teller, to rescue the centuries' treasure before it is too late. It is as though the past is a great ship that has gone ashore, and archivist and writer must gather as much of the rich squandered cargo as they can.[111]

Because he felt that existence nowadays was being increasingly drained of meaning and that many artists, instead of working to preserve life-giving archetypes and symbols, were devoting their skills to deeper chaos and meaninglessness, he turned to poetry as a memory and celebration of man's heritage and man's beginnings. In one of his last poems, "To a Hamnavoe poet of 2093", he summarises this basic approach, making an urgent statement about the task of a poet. Addressing his readers, he reminds everybody, but especially poets and artists, what he thinks is of the essence. The poem encapsulates everything, his aesthetic approach, his poetic task and his concern with humanity:

> I hoard, before time's waste
> Old country-images: plough-horse,
> Skylark, grass-growth,
> Corn-surge, dewfall, anvil;
> [...]
> Folk must not forget
> The marks on the rock. ("To a Hamnavoe Poet...", *FaL*, pp. 13-14)

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[108] See Alan MacGillivray, review of *A Spell for Green Corn*, in *The New Shetlander* 93 (1970), p. 30.
[109] See GMB, *As I remember*, p. 21.
[110] See Edwin Muir, *Essays on Literature and Society*, p. 225.
[111] See GMB, "Enchantment of Islands: A poet's sources", MS and TS (9/6/1993, written for Loganair Magazine), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3116.2.

In order to reach his twentieth-century readers Brown attempted to transform the saga-language so that it would be "in accord with modern taste".[112] His concern with the twentieth century and his wish to share his experience of the past with his readers is further expressed in the following comment:

> Those earlier Orkney folk had left behind them huge deposits of narrative. I felt rather like Aladdin in the enchanted cave. Nothing remained to do but to use my imagination to fill out blank or obscure places, and deploy modern techniques to make the old stories enjoyable to readers of the twentieth century. [...] It is interesting to me to see how deep-rooted [...] characteristics manifest themselves in modern men and women.[113]

Central to his imaginative journey back and to an understanding of his approach to the past where he finds it easier to see life "as it is", are Muir's ideas about the poetic imagination. For Muir, as for Brown, poetry strives after simplicity, not complexity. Among English poets, Muir's ideal was Wordsworth. Inspired by Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Muir set out to describe the poetic imagination as a state "in which we see into the life of things, and it is the seeing that matters; Without that there would be nothing but an intense inarticulate feeling."[114] Commenting on Rilke's account of his experience of inseeing ("einsehen") and letting himself into the centre of the object or phenomenon which he wishes to describe, Muir concludes that if, as a poet, one lets oneself into the centre of something one may understand it, but one will no longer see it. Therefore he maintains:

> The normal working of the imagination is different; it both enters into and sees, is both inside and outside. [...] For the imagination, as it is employed by the poet, the story-teller, the dramatist and the novelist, is the faculty by which life is grasped in its individual forms, and human beings and all living things are shown as they live and move. It cannot and does not wish to arrest its imagined figures so as to submit them to a precise examination, for it is in their movement that they live.[115]

Avoiding "precise examination" of character or situation, Brown's focus is also on the constants and patterns in the life of his characters. Often therefore the characters in his works are little more than ideas or abstractions and they are what they are because of their role or position within a community and within time:[116] "the (old) man", "the woman", "a priest", "the fisherman", "the child" "the tinker" "the

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[112] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 3.

[113] See GMB, "Contemporary authors", MS (10/4/1983), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2846.2.

[114] See Edwin Muir, *Essays on Literature and Society* (1949), p. 218. Muir illustrates the use of the poetic imagination by quoting from *The Prelude*, as this is a poem which "shows it at work": *that blessed mood/ In which the burthen of the mystery,/ [...] Is lightened [...]/ While with an eye made quiet by the power/ Of harmony, [...]/ We see into the life of things.*

[115] Ibid., p. 220.

[116] Stewart Conn has pointed out that Brown's "characters have come in for criticism as being two-dimensional, cardboard"; see "Poets of the 60s II: George Mackay Brown", in *Lines Review* 22 (Winter 1966), p. 12.

horseman" etc.[117] Like Muir, Brown aimed at stripping the empirical world and the characters down to essentials. To do so, and to see into the life of things, he needed to enter into its kernel, where he saw the archetypal shape behind it. At the same time, however, he had to distance himself from it in order to be more susceptible to the constants and the "patterns-within-flux". For this reasons Brown criticised his poem "JFK" because he thought "it was probably written too near the event".[118] The poetic imagination as Muir perceived it can explain how Brown approached the past: it was not done by researching a historical situation and retelling a story in the light of historical facts. Orkney at any time is rather seen as a symbol of basic human simplicities and realities whereby the "flavour" and "rhythm" of incidents or situations is more important to him than accurate descriptions, as he points out in his autobiography.[119] It was part of Brown's artistic purpose to select images and patterns from the past in order to work them into a harmonious and meaningful ideal. Fully aware that "it is not the fashion nowadays [...] to work in this way" Brown thought that it was also a "distrust of the real" that left him "stranded centuries back".[120] This distrust of the real, and consequently, his way of perceiving life, extracting from it what is thought to be of lasting relevance and describing it in terms of first-hand experience or an innocent eye – which sometimes comes close to a kind of immediacy and naiveté typical of a child who does not take into account the "real" or the knowledge that science and history have accumulated – is a technique that Brown shared with Muir. In *Scottish Journey*, recalling the first impressions he had of Edinburgh, Muir comments on this kind of awareness, which is later described in more detail in his autobiography:

> This first impression, though fragmentary and dream-like, has the advantage of being far more vivid than any of my later ones, perhaps because I had not yet accumulated literary and historical reminiscences to obscure what I actually saw.[121]

Such an innocent and immediate view of the world, allowing the unconscious to enter at any point in order to heighten the experience unites different modes of perception. This "double vision" that Brown admired in Muir is at its best a visionary perception and a summoning-up of images and symbols of opposed and contradictory worlds. It is vivid when Muir travels between this world and the world of imagination, reporting what he saw on the other side:

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[117] See Anne Cluysenaar reviewing *Fishermen with Ploughs,* in Stand 13, no. 1 (1972), p. 75. She criticises this kind of perception and presentation of character as a "crudity of social perception".
[118] See William Sharpton, "Hamnavoe Revisited. An interview with George Mackay Brown." In *Chapman* 84 (1996), p. 24.
[119] See *For the Islands I sing*, p. 179.
[120] Ibid., pp. 179-180.
[121] See Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey*, p. 8.

> One foot in Eden still, I stand
> And look across the other land.
> The world's great day is growing late,
> Yet strange these fields that we have planted
> So long with crops of love and hate. ("One Foot in Eden", *CP*, p. 227)

– or when he relies on both the world of conscious day and that of the night which is ancestral, impersonal, yet deeply familiar, and wise with the wisdom of countless generations of which he as a poet, is the transcriber:

> The night, the night alone is old
> And showed me only what I knew,
> Knew, yet never had been told;
> A speech that from the darkness grew
> Too deep for daily tongues to say,
> Archaic dialogue of a few
> Upon the sixth or seventh day.
> And shapes too simple for a place
> In the day's shrill complexity
> Came and were more natural, more
> Expected than my father's face
> Smiling across the open door,
> More simple than the sanded floor
> In unexplained simplicity. ("Day and Night", *CP*, p. 240)

Commenting on this mode of imagination and perception which is diametrically opposed to realism, Brown believed that mere historical or scientific facts can obscure the deeper facts of life:

> I used to reproach myself with being too lazy to research a situation thoroughly before writing about it. But now I am sure that this is not how the creative energies work. All that is required is a suggestion, a flavour, a rhythm, an aroma. [...] Realism is the enemy of the creative imagination.[122]

Thus, in *Beside the Ocean of Time* (1992) the true perception of life is revealed in the boy Thorfinn's dreams, visions and insights, suggesting that the truths seen in his dreams, though ridiculed by teachers and the adult world of abstract knowledge, are of the essence. What Thorfinn experiences in his dreams is, as Brown suggests, of a more educating nature than lessons in the "prison house" of school, since he regards the boy's imaginative approach to his country's history as a making of patterns.

In Brown's poetry too there are instances where he preserves similar feelings of awe and wonder informed by a simple, pure and sometimes naive and child-like view of the world. This "vivid sense of delight" that Muir identified in Brown's work[123] is evident in poems like "Beachcomber" where the life of a man is compressed into the seven days of the week and seen in terms of the little treasures he finds on the shore every day. All time is held in the cell of a single day or week:

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[122] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 179-180.
[123] See letter of Edwin Muir to GMB, 8/12/1957.

Monday I found a boot – [...].
Tuesday a spar of timber [...].
Wednesday a half can of Swedish spirits.[...]
Thursday I got nothing, seaweed, [...].
Sunday, for fear of the elders,
I sit on my bum.
What's heaven? A sea chest with a thousand gold coins. ("Beachcomber", *FwP*, p. 63).

In *Voyages* (1983), the end of the voyage is paralleled by the end of a life. The brevity of human existence is described in the last poem of the collection, "Countryman": "Be silent story, soon./ You did not take long to tell."[124] In "Eynhallow: Crofter and Monastery", Brown describes the simple existence of a crofter through the crofter's eyes, delighting in a simple language and imagination which captures the basic mysteries of nature and life in a sturdy, everyday, immediate and unreflected way.

I rent and till a patch of dirt
Not much bigger than my coat. [...]

The name of my wife is Hild.
Hild has a bitter tongue.
She makes passable butter and ale.
Her mouth brims and brims with bairnsong. [...]

What's winter? A thousand stars,
Shrinkings of snow, an empty pail.[...]

I say a prayer when I remember.
When the bishop comes to bless his flock
I tell my sins and give him a fish.
Once I saw a sealwoman on a rock. [...] ("Eynhallow:...", *SP*, p. 94)

Frequently Brown relies on kenning, runic compression or riddle in his attempt to approximate the kind of innocence, simplicity and immediacy which is typical of the characters depicted in sagas or the "simplicity of stark, fundamental human things" that Muir thought was most perfectly expressed in the Scottish ballads.[125] The striving for simplicity in Brown's poetry is made symbolical by the juxtaposition of land and sea, farming and fishing:

Crofter-Fisherman
Sea-plough, fish-plough, provider
Make orderly furrows.
The herring will jostle like August corn. ("Sea Runes", SP, p. 65)

Brown thrived on the use of contrast. In the foreword to *Witch and Other Stories* he declares that it is in contrast "that a storyteller finds his greatest delight"; elsewhere, being more specific, he admits: "Without that symbolical figure, the Orkney crofter with a boat, I think I could not have written a word of any significance."[126] Contrast

[124] See GMB, *Selected Poems*, p. 142.
[125] See Edwin Muir, *Latitudes*, p. 17.
[126] See GMB, "An Autobiographical Essay", in *As I remember*, p. 16.

and perspective are also used when an ordinary event or character is chosen and described or approached from different angles. This technique of setting individual people round a situation in order to bring out the fullness of the situation and of the people and their states of mind, has an original and vivid effect. Brown used this technique extensively in *The Year of the Whale*:

> Because of his long pilgrimage
> From pub to alehouse
> And all the liquor laws he'd flout,
> Being under age [...]
> Mansie brought a twelve-year bottle.
>
> Because his shy foot turned aside
> From Merran's door,
> And Olga's coat with the red button [...]
> Marget sewed a long chaste shroud.
>
> Because the scythe was in the oats
> When he lay flat, [...]
> And Sanders said
> "Corn enough here for every tramp and rat",
> Sigrid baked her lightest bread.
>
> Because his dance was gathered now [...]
> Tammas brought his Swedish fiddle. ("The Funeral of Ally Flett", *YoW*, p. 9)

This device is also used in such poems as "Shipwreck", "The Abbot", "Hamnavoe Market" as well as in "The Stranger" of *Loaves and Fishes* and in short-stories such as "The Wheel" in *A Calendar of Love*.

Brown's ambition to return to the "sources" and transform the ordinary into something extraordinary adds an element of innocence, wonder and simplicity to his writing. Given that he shared Muir's fascination with the ballads this is not surprising. Muir believed in the recovery of a simple story at the heart of poetry:

> The tragic story affects us with unique power because it moves in time, and because we live in time. It reminds us of the pattern of our lives; [...] Matthew Arnold urged that the representation of an action was essential for a great poem, and he meant something like this, since a great story gives a more complete idea of our temporal lives than any other means that has been discovered. [...] Some poets of our time have used it effectively: I think of Robert Frost and certain poems of T. S. Eliot. But the story, although it is our story, is disappearing from poetry.[127]

To him the story in time was one of the main resources of poetry; taken over by the novel, it expanded into something different from what it was when used in poetry. He held that compared to its use in the novel,

> The old story was quite simple. It followed some figure [...] through time; and it remains the most pure image that we have of temporal life, tracing the journey which we shall take.[128]

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[127] See Edwin Muir, "Wordsworth: Return to the Sources", in *The Estate of Poetry*, p. 28.
[128] Ibid.

Muir found a "return to the sources of poetry" in Wordsworth who, by returning to "incidents and situations of common life", dealt with ordinary events which involve a story. In the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* he set out his aim as a poet:

> The principle object [...] proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations form common life, and to relate or describe them [...] as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further [...] to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, the primary laws of our nature.[129]

Brown found this in Norse story-telling, the sagas and the Scottish ballads:

> Further back the stories go, long beyond the remembrance of the storyteller at the fire; then all unnecessary details are left out, such as the colour of a character's eyes [...] and out of the starkness the hero looms larger than life, and every word he utters is simple and portentous. Then the tale is more a legend than a story.[130]

In "A Note on the Scottish Ballads" Muir illuminated this by referring to the world in which the ballads were created as the real world of art:

> This world in which there is no reflection, no regard for the utility of action, nothing but pure passion seen through pure vision, is [...] the world of art. To raise immediate passion to poetry in this way [...] requires a vision of unconditional clearness, like that of a child; and it may be said of the Scottish ballad-writers that they attained poetry by pure, unalleviated insight [...]. This is what gives them their magic, a magic of ultimate simplicity.[131]

In *The Estate of Poetry* Muir remarked about the style of the ballads that except for those ballads which are concerned with legendary, supernatural or religious subjects, most of them deal with actual events or characters. They tell a simple story:

> The style of this poetry, especially in the ballads, is not popular [...] The ballads are not popular but traditional. [...] You will never find in them those observations on human life which make the poetry of Burns so attractive and popular. [...] This kind of poetry has no sentimental appeal. It simply sets down life as it appeared to the peasantry: an ancestral vision simplified to the last degree. [...] That style is immediately recognizable as the style of a great poet. Its marks are brevity and strength. It plunges straight into the theme.[132]

Brown's works are also examples of a "good pure image of temporal life"; often, he followed some figure through time, tracing the journey which Man shall take (e.g. in "Countryman" or "Journey" of *FaL*). In most of his poems he recounts an action depicting characters in certain situations and following them as they move through one day, one week or a whole year.[133] However, many of Brown's works were not

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[129] Quoted from Muir, *The Estate of Poetry*, p. 30

[130] See GMB, introduction to *Witch and Other Stories* (London 1977), p. viii.

[131] See "A Note on the Scottish Ballads", in Edwin Muir, *Latitudes*, pp. 12-30; (p. 22)

[132] See Edwin Muir, *The Estate of Poetry*, pp. 13-14.

[133] See "The Hawk", "The Laird", "A Child's Calendar", "Beachcomber", "Vikings", "Earl Hakon", "The Death of Magnus", "Magnus", "Voyages of Arnor" etc., or poems where he retells historical or mythic events.

only inspired by old Norse subjects and stories but they also read like attempts to be true to the spirit of the ballads, skaldic verse, the sagas and the mind of the ballad-singer or bard. Brown's yielding of pure images as in "Gregory Hero" is linked to the heraldic method of naming things rather than describing them;[134] thus he tried to achieve what he admired in the ballads:

> The ballad maker is not interested in the details, only in the central situation, the skeleton of the story.[135]

and in the sagas:

> I admire the "pure" art of the sagamen, everything extraneous such as the detailed description of people and places and comments by the author on what is happening, is ruthlessly excluded.[136]

What he means by "pure narrative" is further explained in his autobiography; it is narrative

> from which everything that might interrupt the flow of the story (description, comment, reflection) is excluded. The characters reveal themselves in a few curt words [...] short intricate webs of alliteration and kennings. [...] I have learnt from them the importance of pure shape.[137]

[134] See GMB, *LaF*, "Gregory Hero", p. 17: "Five suns lit his dust./ They're out, and for his death/ We yield him images: he was/ A Viking ship, a white stallion."
[135] See GMB, "The Last Ballad", in *The Listener*, 20/6/1968, p. 800.
[136] See GMB, introduction to *Witch*, p. x.
[137] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 64-65.

3.2.1 The art of the ballads

Muir found a sense of delight and magic in the Scottish Ballads regarding them as expressions of a vision of life which was immediate and informed by a simplicity that could yet explain the enormity of life in all its basic aspects. He referred to this immediate and meaningful relationship between life and poetry as the original or natural state of poetry. The ballads were part of the life of the peasantry and embodied for them the sense of the mystery surrounding them; in the ballads and their folk art, the peasantry "saw at one glance and with no sense of incongruity, Christian revelation and natural magic".[138] In *The Estate of Poetry* (1962) he further explored how the great number of ballads and songs handed down from generation to generation were part of people's life and an unquestioned sustenance and enjoyment among the peasantry. He saw the ballads, which frequently summoned up the early tragic world and set down life as it appeared to the peasantry, as the poetic sustenance of those people who lived in close contact with the land, the soil, the natural as well as the supernatural world. Moreover, he admired their ability to utter with entire simplicity "what human beings have felt from the beginning of time and must feel until time ends".[139] What was more, the ballads were created in a time when there was neither poet nor public, "when the anonymous song or ballad was transmitted from generation to generation by the peasantry, and the poetry was a possession so common that poet and audience were lost in it, indistinguishably".[140]
Brown agreed with Muir; in his autobiography he asserts that "the early epics and ballads are from the pure strong rock of the spring itself".[141] That they were mostly created anonymously or communally is a point which further captured his imagination and seemed to him to be central to the spirit that the ballads conveyed:

> I have the feeling that not one man made those great ballads; in a real sense they are the work of an entire tribe or community. [...]. Over the past four centuries there has been too much emphasis on the life and personality of authors. [...] but in fact the works are not theirs only but have come from the whole community in which they live.[142]

The views Muir expressed in his critical writings about poetry and the role of the poet were developed by Brown. In a chapter on the ballads and the ballad-singers in *An Orkney Tapestry,* he implies that poetry is a potential force that brings out in us an "immortal pearl" which we have lost and which can only be hinted at through the visions we get through song, story or poem; the poet, however, is unimportant:

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[138] See Edwin Muir, *The Estate of Poetry*, p. 17.
[139] See Edwin Muir, *Latitudes*, p. 18.
[140] See Edwin Muir, "The Public and the Poet", in *The Estate of Poetry*, p. 94 ff.
[141] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 37.
[142] Ibid., p. 38 ff.

> The poet paused. [...] He himself was a person of no consequence; at the end of the entertainment he would be given a groat, or a crown [...]. He was nothing; but while the ballad lasted these great Ones of Orkney were his utterly, he could make them laugh or weep as he chose, or beg for more like dogs. His slow formal chant probed them to their innermost sanctuaries [...] but also hinted at an immortal pearl lost under the vanities and prodigalities of their days.[143]

Both poets saw in the customs of the peasantry the ancient magical ceremonial quality of art. In the mind of farmers and people who lived close to the land and agricultural rhythms, art was still interwoven with death and fruition. Therefore, Brown adds in a chapter on "Lore", quoting Storm Kolson, the old blind Orkney fiddler:

> "Art must be of *use*, a coercive rhyme, to strand a whale on the rock, a scratch to make the corn grow. [...]" And he remembered, as an example of true art, "a stone between field and beach. Some fisherman with a plough had scratched on it a fish and a cornstalk – wind and wave going through both in a single wavering fruitful line."[144]

Brown was fascinated by the idea that in the past the "use" of poetry was more immediate and experiential, sustained by a way of life in which superstition, religion, ancient knowledge could be expressed in songs, stories and poems and could help explain the mysteries of life and death. He was anxious to point out that in our time this ancient "use" of poetry – though perhaps not as immediately recognisable because most rituals or ceremonies have lost their place in today's world – has not changed. At any time the use of poetry is, as he argued in a speech for the St. Magnus Festival in 1989:

> to enable us to come to terms with those powers that cannot be denied. [...] We can actually hold a dialogue with them, through the medium of poetry – pitting our few frail questions against their adamantine decrees and utterances.[145]

The relation between man and the natural world could, as Muir observed in *Scottish Journey* (1935), only survive in an agricultural community because there the working of the land was more than a business. In such communities there was

> an ideal balance between the soil and man who lives on it; that the ground itself has certain rights, and that when these are violated the relation between man and nature goes wrong. [...] I think that it exists as a quite genuine conviction in ordinary people who live in immediate contact with the soil, in small farmers, for example, to whom ploughing and reaping are more than a business.[146]

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[143] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, pp. 151-154.

[144] Ibid., p. 130.

[145] See George Mackay Brown, "The Realms of Gold", quoted in *Chapman* 60 (1990), p. 28. Elsewhere Brown also referred to poetry as being the "handmaiden" of religion, thus defining the "use" of poetry in terms of his faith.

[146] See Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey* (London 1935), p. 71.

The farmers had customs "which sanctioned their instinctive feelings for the earth".[147] George Marshall points out that these feelings were also passed on to Muir himself, suggesting that he too

> was given to using images of cultivation, suggesting, for example, that every poet is given "a patch of ground which he is at liberty to cultivate", and devoting a whole poem, "The Place of Light and Darkness" to an image of a resurrection that is a harvest gathered by the great husbandman.[148]

In his diary Muir writes of his love of "ploughed fields, especially of harvest fields, and stacks where all is gathered – the most satisfying sight there is" (March 1939).[149] Brown also emphasised on many occasions how lucky he was to have been brought up in Orkney, among farmers and fishermen who to him were "more than workers. They take part in basic rituals that give meaning to the labours of all men. They are caught up with the elements in a grave, beautiful dance of fruition."[150]

No doubt, Brown's structure of thought is close to the ballad and storytelling tradition; however, his style and language too are not far removed from that of the ballads, folksong or the sagas.[151] *In An Orkney Tapestry*, as later in *Winterfold* he included some imitations of twelfth-century Norse lyrics. He avoids lengthy descriptions of situations and characters and refrains from sentimentalising, as in "Crofters Death"; on many occasions, there is also space for humour even though the situation is tragic. In "The Warped Boat" Brown reports what happened to Willag, the fisherman:

> So Willag, before the *Merle* turned over
> Rose from the rowlocks
> And remarked to the open mouths on the shore,
> "Drive old Bess, the fence-breaker, from
> the oats
> Back to her patch of clover.
> Yes, Breck can have my horse for his five goats.
> And Jeannie is wrong again.
> She raged by all that was holy I'd drown and
> die
> In steepings of malt.
> A fine evening it was for going to the sillocks.
> But men,
> It's a coarse drink at the end of a day, this salt"
> His sea boots filled, and Willag said no more. ("The Warped Boat", *FwP*, p. 47.)

[147] See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (London 1980), p. 63.
[148] See George Marshall, *In a distant Isle*, p. 49.
[149] See P. H. Butter, *Man and Poet*, p. 163, quoted in Marshall, p. 49.
[150] See George Mackay Brown, "Writer's Shop", in *Chapman* 16, vol. 4, no. 4 (1976), p. 23.
[151] Norse literature and the Scottish ballads had a profound influence on Brown. Graeme Roberts, Julian D'Arcy and Rowena Murray respectively have discussed in more detail the influence of the ballads and the sagas on his style, his plots and motifs. Graeme Roberts, "Tradition and Pattern in the short stories of George Mackay Brown", in D. Hewitt, and M. Spiller (eds.), *The Literature of the North* (Aberdeen 1983), pp. 177-188.

The presentation of ordinary things in an unusual aspect and a delight in what Wordsworth called the "seeing into the life of things", or "if that claim appears excessive, as an uncommon attention concentrated on experiences which for most of us would appear ordinary"[152] naturally appealed to Brown. His attempts to "make elaborate kennings out of ordinary matters"[153] coincide with this approach. Furthermore, to "trace the primary laws of our nature" is what Brown meant when he said that all art is pattern-seeking: "I do it more shamelessly than most artists".[154] To depict ordinary events and characters and recover in them fading patterns became a delightful contemplation for Brown, and his faith made even the most ordinary human being important to him. Whether farmer, fisherman or carpenter, "grey mediocre people [...] Poor people, they were yet lords and princes with heavenly treasures".[155] Brown elevates ordinary events and characters by suggesting that they are repetitions of a mythic and religious ritual or ceremony. The work of fishermen frequently echoes that of Christ, suggesting that they are "fishers of men"; the division of loaves and fishes recalls the biblical story of the miracles and the birth of a child evokes the birth of Christ.[156] In this way, Brown's religion and his fascination with biblical stories added an even deeper meaning to his natural feeling of man's relation with the earth and the past.

[152] See Edwin Muir, *Essays on Literature and Society*, p. 222.
[153] See GMB's introduction to *Orkney Short Stories* (Edinburgh1983).
[154] See GMB, letter to D. J. Jones, (1979), EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 2029/9/1, 1-9.
[155] See GMB, "The Broken Heraldry", in K. Miller (ed.), *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland* (London 1970), p. 145.
[156] For more on the transformation of the commonplace, see Alison M. Smith, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Study of the Modern Scottish Novel." (M.Litt. University of Aberdeen 1985), especially chapter three on Neil Gunn and George Mackay Brown.

3.3 Muir's and Brown's religious poetry

Although Muir belonged to no church and subscribed to no formulated doctrine, he was a Christian and mystic.[157] Yet, he did not come easily to his belief. His autobiography describes how he finally acknowledged the necessity of faith, arriving at the conviction that

> we receive more than we can ever give; we receive it from the past, on which we draw with every breath, but also – and this is a point of faith – from the Source of the mystery itself, by the means which religious people call Grace.[158]

In his mid-thirties, he became aware of immortality which made him realise that

> we can know what we are only if we accept some of the hypotheses of religion. Human beings are understandable only as immortal spirits. [...] human life without immortality would be inconceivable to me, though that is not the ground for my belief.[159]

For Muir, human nature was rooted in spirit. However, as P. H. Butter has pointed out, Muir, while admitting to faith in immortality, was anxious not to build a structure of belief on this experience.[160] Rather, he thought that "immortality was not an idea but a state of being in which man keeps alive in himself his perception of that boundless union and freedom, which he can faintly apprehend in time, though its consummation lies beyond time". Although he acknowledged that life "is not fulfilled in our world, but reaches through all eternity"[161] it was only years later, when recalling his experience with the Lord's Prayer that he realised that he had been a Christian without knowing it.[162] In Rome he began to feel that the Incarnation was "the very mark of Christianity". Yet, he never turned to any formulated doctrine. As O'Donoghue holds – underlining the mystical element in his faith and poetry – Muir worked out his own mystical theology, "a theology which has its centre in a receptivity to divine intimations and experiences".[163] Thus, his faith was

> a theology lived and suffered in a lifetime's quest for understanding, and expressed in symbol and story. It is not a theology that with the aid of this or that philosophy [...] tries to give a coherent and systematic account of what Scripture tells us so variously and mysteriously about God; rather it is a theology of the meeting point, between man and God, as if that meeting-point, which is the mind and the heart of man, were a mirror or pool reflecting the whole firmament of divine manifestation.[164]

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[157] See Muir's autobiography, p. 276, and N. D. O'Donoghue, "Edwin Muir: The Untutored Mystic", in *Edwin Muir. Centenary Assessments* (Aberdeen 1990), pp. 119-128.
[158] See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, p. 277.
[159] Ibid., p. 43.
[160] See P. H. Butter, *Edwin Muir. Man and Poet*, p. 82.
[161] See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, p. 164.
[162] Ibid., pp. 241-242.
[163] See O'Donoghue in *Edwin Muir. Centenary Assessments*, p. 126.
[164] Ibid.

P. H. Butter also thinks that all of Muir's best religious poems are "expressions of what he had felt, seen, or imagined".[165] Further commenting on his spiritual development and his experience with religion E. Hubermann holds that all the insights Muir had, revealing the light of the "clear unfallen world" and other images of Eden or the lost world of natural good, were often scattered, and all the moments of insight disconnected: "There was no single principle binding them all together, no key which explained their common meaning, and this was the key Muir sought."[166] It was not until he came to Rome in 1948 that he found images which told him for the first time that "Christ had walked on earth".[167] Huberman emphasises that Muir's belief in the Incarnation became the key which could explain all paradox and reconciliate all opposites for him. However, the Christ that Muir pictures in such poems as "The Son" or "The Christmas" is, as Huberman states, more a symbol of "opposites mystically resolved", of "flesh transfused with spirit, rather than an exponent of a particular theology".[168] She adds:

> Muir finds an image for that reconciliation of opposites, that communion of time with eternity, of which Christ, he believed, was the universal symbol. But neither here, in dealing with the Annunciation, nor elsewhere in dealing with the figure of Christ, does he speak in conventional religious terms.[169]

Frequently, Muir's concern was with the more metaphysical or mystical significance of an experience or vision rather than a strictly religious one. He found the earthly and humane element that is seen as a reflection of an eternal spirit more meaningful than any doctrinal Christian or Catholic interpretations of biblical stories or events. His poem "The Annunciation", inspired by a plaque that he saw on the wall of a house in Rome, showing the meeting of Mary with the angel Gabriel, is a poem which demonstrates this approach. In his treatment of the Annunciation Muir distanced himself from the biblical story and describes the event simply as the meeting of an angel and a girl, " their bodies inclined towards each other, their knees bent as if they were overcome by love". To him "that representation of a human love so intense that it could not reach farther seemed the perfect earthly symbol of the love that passes understanding".[170] It is the divine mystery made visible on earth as it shines through human love and the human spirit that Muir thought was a proof of the communion of time with eternity. This vision of human life reconciles all opposites, as it reconciles the opposite of the girl (mortal spirit) and the angel (eternal spirit).

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[165] P. H. Butter, *Edwin Muir. Man and Poet*, p. 82.
[166] See E. Hubermann, *The Poetry of Edwin Muir* (Oxford 1971), pp. 214-215.
[167] See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, p. 176.
[168] See E. Hubermann, *The Poetry of Edwin Muir*, p. 216.
[169] Ibid., p. 217.
[170] See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, p. 174.

Accordingly, Christ, who was made flesh and walked on earth becomes the universal symbol of the reconciliation of all opposites. In this sense, most of Muir's Christian poetry is Christian by convergence of symbols, not by subscription to doctrine. In many of his poems the focus is on human, not necessarily transcendental love or on how the earth or human beings are transfigured by their own visions and experiences ("The Transfiguration": "Was it a vision?...Reality or vision, this we have seen") His poetry is not strictly devotional; he does not usually address God or speak of his relation to him although there are exceptions in "The Killing": "That was the day they killed the Son of God [...]/ We watched the writhings, heard the moanings, [...] I was a stranger, could not read these people/ Or this outlandish deity. Did a God/ Indeed in dying cross my life that day/ By chance , he on his road and I on mine?"[171] and in "Sonnet", a poem which is thought to belong to the last five years of Muir's life, where he addresses the Lord: "You will not leave us, for you cannot, Lord."[172] In his early poetry Muir also suggests that the universe is presided over by God, even though God is not mentioned. In a letter to Stephen Hudson about "Chorus of the Newly Dead" he commented:

> The atmosphere I am aiming at is one of mystery and wonder at the life of the earth. There will be no dogmatic justification, and as little mere thought as possible; no mention of the name of God, but an assumption of infinite and incalculable powers behind the visible drama. Yet I hope that in the end a feeling of gratification will be given by the poem as a whole.[173]

David Daiches said about Muir that many of his poems are

> religious poems that work by indirection, concerning themselves not with recognized religious themes but with states of mind, dreams, moments of awareness, sad or hopeful or paradoxical vision of past and future, of cruelty and barrenness and fulfillment and resurrection counterpointed against each other so as to project a questing sensibility that is simultaneously restless and at peace.[174]

Poems like "The Wheel", or "The Transmutation", – read in conjunction with earlier poems where he tried to come to terms with his nightmare sense of being imprisoned in time and history, trapped by a meaningless succession of events or a Nietzschean eternal recurrence – demonstrate that his belief in the presence of God enabled him to arrive at a more positive view of time and human existence. Through his belief in immortality, he saw a different order which allowed for creation and human choice; God's presence in the universe made human love and freedom possible. In "The Wheel", he presents an order opposed to that of a deterministic world. Because of the

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[171] See Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems*, pp. 224-225.
[172] Ibid., p. 257.
[173] See P. H. Butter, *Edwin Muir. Selected Letters*, letter to Stephen Hudson, 7/5/1924; p. 37.
[174] See David Daiches, *God and the Poets* (Oxford 1984), p. 178.

mystery of Christianity, he thought we can weave a permanent pattern which counterpoints the "neutral violence" of a life governed by fate:

> How can I turn this wheel that turns my life
> Create another hand to move this hand [...]?
> Set a new mark? Circumvent history?
> Nothing can come of history but history,
> The stationary storm that cannot bate
> Its neutral violence, [...]
> Unless a grace
> Come of itself to wrap our souls in peace
> Between the turning leaves of history and make
> Ourselves ourselves, winnow the grudging grain,
> And take
> From that which made us that which will make us again. ("The Wheel", *CP*, p. 105)

Similarly, in "The Transmutation", his faith in immortality enabled him to escape out of time. He realised that time is not a closed system and that "there is something else in us not dictated by time."[175] Instead, "we [...] fall/ Through time's long ruin" and are transmuted by the experience of eternal moments. The permanencies of life are not neutral and indifferent repetitions but transmutations and it is not fate, but human beings themselves, presided over by the love of God, "who [...] should weave this phantom ground/ And in its ghostly borders gather all".[176] The key to this mystery of an escape out of a meaningless succession of events is Christianity.

Unlike Muir, whose work is said to have witnessed a comparatively slower and more difficult birth of the mystical and Christian element, Brown's attraction to religion started early in his life and shaped his thought and work from the start of his career. It helped him develop a vision which defined the purpose of art and literature in terms of his faith and basic spiritual needs. He believed that the function of poetry and all the arts is to give expression to questions of human existence and to celebrate the mystery of faith since:

> Every serious writer has to take religion into his reckoning, if only to reject it, because literature asks the same questions: Where do we come from? What are we doing in the world? Where are we going?[177]

Brown's growing interest in Christian symbolism and, more specifically in the rituals and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church gradually developed over many years from his adolescence onwards until his final conversion in 1961. Roman Catholicism offered him a more inclusive outlook:

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[175] See Muir's letter to Stephen Spender, 12/3/1944, quoted in Butter, *Selected Letters*, p. 137.
[176] See Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems*, p. 145.
[177] See GMB, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1866/17; It is interesting to point out here that Brown echoes a passage in Muir's *An Autobiography* where he writes that: "Our minds are possessed by three mysteries: where we came from, where we are going, and, since we are not alone, but members of a [...] family, how we should live with one another"(p. 56).

> the religious element is strong. I believe myself it strengthens my work [...]. At least it provides a solid groundwork; in this essential way, that without the explanation that Catholicism provides, I would not see any clear meaning in life at all.[178]

Apart from other things, one of the main attractions of Catholicism and the Incarnation was for him, as indeed for Muir, the richness of their imagery. However, in his religious symbolism and fascination with the Catholic Mass Brown was more sacramental and doctrinal than Muir. At the same time his dealing with the Eucharist, particularly his welding together of the Christian sacrifice and the Christian church with his northern versions of pagan and agricultural sacrifice, is unique. He brings together the pagan and the Christian world in the person of Christ and in the ceremony of the Eucharist. In the poem "John Barleycorn" for instance, the unending ritual of harvest is seen as a synthesis of Christ's crucifixion and the miracle of transubstantiation which is repeated in the making of bread and ale. By equating the natural "resurrection" of corn and seed with the supernatural resurrection of Christ, Brown makes a statement of faith: death is not the negation of life, but its completion. Ceremonies and rituals enable the poet, or the priest when he celebrates Christ's Resurrection through the Eucharist, to heighten the ordinary and earthly to the holy. The intermingling of agricultural rituals, pagan ceremonies and Christian symbolism is also done effectively in "Elegy" where the furrows are described as holy and the hill takes on the meaning of a "sacrificial hill". The cornstalks symbolise Christ's resurrection:

> The ploughman turns
> Furrow by holy furrow
> The liturgy of April.
> What rock of sorrow
> Checks the seed's throb and flow
> Now the lark's skein is thrown
> About the burning sacrificial hill?
> [...]
>
> Now let those risers from the dead,
> Cornstalks, golden conspirators,
> Cry on the careless wind
> Ripeness and resurrection;
> How the calm wound
> Of the girl entering earth's side
> Gives back immortal bread
> For this year's dust and rain that shall be man. ("Elegy", *LaF*, p. 40)

The direction followed in "Elegy", is already suggested in the poem "Dream of Winter" where Brown draws heavily on religious and pagan ritual:

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[178] See GMB, letter to David Morrison, 10/1/1970, in The National Library of Scotland, Acc 6374.

He saw the victim nailed against the night
With ritual stars. The skull, a ruin of dreams,
Leaned in the wind, merry with curl and thorn.
The long robes circled. A penitential wail
For the blue lobster and the yellow cornstalk
And the hooded victim, broken to let men live,
Flashed from their throats ("Dream of Winter", *LaF*, p. 38)

The body "nailed against the night/ With ritual stars" becomes the "victim broken to let men live", and is a clear reference to Christ. As in Muir's poetry, the interconnection of the holy and the ordinary is striking in Brown's work. Everyday images hold the power to celebrate the mystery of God. This elevation of the ordinary and mundane into the symbolic is best seen in Brown's descriptions of crofters and fishermen in terms of Christ-figures and the urgency with which he repeatedly counterpoints the work of a crofter with Christ's passion. "Stations of the Cross", and especially the first fourteen couplets of part I "From Stone to Thorn", is a key to an understanding of this vision as the poem describes the stations of the cross in terms of the labour of a crofter, construing a prayer-like language which is both luminous and yet direct and rooted in the everyday.

Condemnation
The winter jar of honey and grain
Is a Lenten urn.

Cross
Lord, it is time. Take our yoke
And sunwards turn.

First Fall
To drudge in furrows till you drop
Is to be born

Mother of God
Out of the mild mothering hill
And the chaste burn.

Simon
God-begun, the barley rack
By man is borne.

Veronica
Foldings of women. Your harrow sweat
Darkens her yarn.

Second Fall
Sower-and-Seed, one flesh, you fling
From stone to thorn.

Women of Jerusalem
You are bound for the Kingdom of Death. The enfolded
Women mourn.

Third Fall
Scythes are sharpened to bring you down,
King Barleycorn.

The Stripping
Flails creak. Golden coat
From kernel is torn.

Crucifixion
The fruitful stones thunder around,
Quern on quern.

Death
The last black hunger rages through you
With hoof and horn.

Pietà
Mother, fold him from those furrows,
Your broken bairn.

Sepulchre
Shepherd, angel, king are kneeling, look,
In the door of the barn. ("Stations of the Cross", SP, pp. 95-96)

It is significant that Brown remarked about the poem:

> Supposing I could only keep one of the poems or stories or plays with which I have further chittered the world [...] it would be a poem called "From Stone to Thorn". Those 14 couplets condense everything I wanted or want, or will ever conceivably want to say.[179]

It captures Brown's Catholicism, his idea of the farmer with his plough and cornstalk as the upholder of civilisation, and how the elemental and the supernatural or divine are interwoven with mystery and beauty. Brown's inclination towards ritualised language and the way he extends elemental and pagan ceremonies into Christian symbolism and ritual is very much his own and differs from Muir. Brown was a more ritualistic poet who believed that we can only make sense of our human predicament in ceremonial ways, using ceremonial language. Thus, while Muir's subject matters were informed by his belief that "Ancestral rite and custom, roof and tree,/ Our songs that tell of our triumphs and disasters/ [...] continuance of fold and hearth,/ Our names and callings, work and rest and sleep, [...] sustain us"[180] Brown attempted to apply this knowledge to his stylistic approach. He drew on traditions and patterns like Norse runes and kennings to heighten the ceremonial or ritual effect of his poetic language. In "Runes from a Holy Island" runic effects and kennings are put in the service of Christian ritual and miracle:

[179] See GMB, 2/5/1983, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2846.1
[180] See Edwin Muir, "The Difficult Land", in *Collected Poems*, p. 237.

Hierarchy
A claret laird,
Seven Fishermen with ploughs
Women, beasts, corn, fish, stones.
[...]
Ruined Chapel
Among scattered Christ stones
Devoutly leave
Torn nets, toothache, winter wombs.

Saint
A starved island, Cormack
With crossed hands,
Stones become haddock and loaf. ("Runes from a Holy Island", *SP*, pp. 44-45)

Other attempts to match an early or pagan view of life and the divine mystery with Christian religion recur throughout Brown's work.[181]

[181] This is discussed in more detail in chapter III, especially 3. 4, "Keeping the flame alive".

3.3.1 The critique of Calvinism

In Brown's work, as in Muir's, there is a strong dislike of many aspects of Calvinism. Frequently there is a sense of sadness and desperation at the damage that the psychological effects of Calvinism have had on Orkney and Scotland. Even after converting to Roman Catholicism in 1961 Brown did not feel entirely freed from Calvinism; although he discarded its doctrines he realised that "You never really get rid of Calvinism all the same. It's sort of bred in your bone, [...] and you're born into it, no amount of other religions will shift that, I know quite well. It's very difficult."[182] Already in the foreword to *The Storm*, Brown defined the task of poets in the aftermath of the Reformation as filling in the gaps that were created in the literature and imagination of the people in a time when "story and ballad were banished as being frivolous, vain, obstacles to the proper serious business of living".[183] Thus he proposed:

> For Scotland I sing,
> the Knox-ruined nation,
> that poet and saint
> must rebuild with their passion.

In his short-story "Master Halcrow, Priest" Brown deals with the effects of the Reformation on Scotland and Orkney. He describes how priests and the mass are abolished. Relic, image and altar are removed from the "old kirk" and replaced by the "new kirk" of the reformers. The priest can only wonder in despair about the "*Blessed Sacrament*" and about how Calvinism might affect people's faith once rituals and symbolic gestures are abolished:

> What might such men do to the Bread of Heaven, seeing that for them now it was no longer the Body of Our Lord but mortal bread over which five invalid words had been uttered?[184]

In his play, *A Spell for Green Corn*, Brown also expresses his sadness about the impact that the Reformation had on the old faith of the island folk and their ability to express, even in pagan rituals and ceremonies essential truths of the divine Word. Quoting from "Storm Kolson's Notebook", Brown summarises the effects of Calvinism: "The Word was imprisoned between black boards, and chained and padlocked, in the pulpit of the kirk – impossible for it to get free among the ploughs and the nets, that season of famine."[185] Many of the stories in *A Time to Keep* show how Brown contrasts Catholicism and Calvinism. In "Celia", all the minister has to say to the alcoholic prostitute Celia, who more than anything in the world wants to

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[182] See GMB, interview in *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 13.
[183] See GMB, "The Pier Head", Script of TV-sequence in 1969; in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1866/12.
[184] See GMB, *A Calendar of Love*, p. 133.
[185] See GMB, *A Spell for Green Corn*, pp. 90-91.

have faith, is that she "must try to have faith"; and he does so "a little hopelessly". Brown implies here that the Calvinist approach to God is not taking into account basic spiritual needs and therefore cannot "nourish the whole world", as it rejects rituals, images and symbols. Celia cannot understand why the human predicament should be so full of pain and why God's kingdom seems distant and unattainable:

> The kingdom I've had a glimpse of [...] seemed real and precious. It seemed like an inheritance we're all born for, something that belongs to us by right. [...] Why do we have to struggle towards it [...]? What's the good of all this mystery? The vision should be like a loaf or a fish, simple and real, something given to nourish the whole world.[186]

This view is informed by Brown's Catholicism and his belief in a more immanent and forgiving God. Protestantism, because it rejects rituals and symbols which could "nourish the whole world" and people's faith, is therefore not an option. For Brown thinks that "Ceremony makes everything bearable and beautiful for us. Transfigured by ceremony, the truths we could not otherwise endure come to us."[187] The tone of *Winterfold* is similar. Brown hints at the divine quality of art when he celebrates harp, image, ballad, dance, symbol, or rune as the "lesser mysteries of art" that are "rooted also/ in that first garden,/ apple-fraught, with pure rinsings".[188]

In *An Orkney Tapestry*, Brown acknowledges that the medieval Church still had the wisdom to make music and art handmaidens of faith, whereas the "Calvinists looked on beauty as a lure of the devil. [...] They kept the visual arts severely in check".[189] As an example of this, the fiddler Storm Kolson in *A Spell for Green Corn* is summoned to confess his sins before the kirk elders, all of whose sins are attributed to "an inordinate love of that musical instrument called *the fiddle*. [...] which [...] is a potent instrument of the devil".[190]

Muir's experience with Calvinism was similar to Brown's. He found many of the Calvinistic doctrines repugnant, especially the idea of divine wrath and the belief in an unforgiving God. In his autobiography he recalls that it was not until he went to Italy, through the images of Christ, that he discovered the Incarnation. The physical presence of the spiritual which was not known to him in Orkney made him aware that this "open declaration was to me the very mark of Christianity, distinguishing it from the older religions".[191] As a child, Muir had been aware of religion "chiefly as the sacred word, and the church itself, severe and decent, with its touching bareness and austerity"; religion seemed to be cut off from the rest of life as if it were shut within

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[186] See GMB, *A Time to Keep*, p. 21.
[187] See GMB, "The Tarn and the Rosary", in *Hawkfall*, p. 198.
[188] See GMB, *Winterfold*, p. 46.
[189] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 130.
[190] Ibid., p. 18.
[191] See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography*, p. 274.

itself, a Word, cold and abstract, almost indifferent to humanity. He further recalls that "it did not tell me by any outward sign that the Word had been made flesh".[192] "The Incarnate One" encapsulates Muir's feeling about and his criticism of the Calvinist Church:

> The windless northern surge, the sea-gull's scream,
> And Calvin's kirk crowning the barren brae.
> I think of Giotto the Tuscan shepherd's dream,
> Christ, man and creature in their inner day.
> How could our race betray
> The Image, and the Incarnate One unmake
> Who chose this form and fashion for our sake?
>
> The Word made flesh is here made word again,
> A word made word in flourish and arrogant crook.
> See there King Calvin with his iron pen,
> And God three angry letters in a book,
> And there the logical hook
> On which the Mystery is impaled and bent
> Into an ideological instrument.
>
> There's better gospel in man's natural tongue,
> And truer sight was theirs outside the Law
> Who saw the far side of the Cross among
> The archaic peoples in their ancient awe,
> In ignorant wonder saw
> The wooden cross-tree on the bare hillside,
> Not knowing that there a God suffered and died. ("The Incarnate One", *CP*, p. 228)

"Scotland 1941" is a similar statement:

> A simple sky roofed in that rustic day,
> The busy corn-fields and the haunted holms,
> The green road winding up the ferny brae.
> But Knox and Melville clapped their preaching palms
> And bundled all the harvesters away, [...]
> We with such courage and the bitter wit
> To fell the ancient oak of loyalty,
> And strip the peopled hill and the altar bare,
> And crush the poet with an iron text,
> How could we read our souls and learn to be? ("Scotland 1941", *CP*, p. 97)

In "Chapel between Cornfield and Shore, Stromness", Brown recalls a similar scenario as Muir does in "Scotland 1941". He is in tune with Muir when he laments the effects of Calvinism; however, he has confidence that the spirit of the chapel and the faith of the people will survive when they celebrate again the ceremony of harvest (resurrection) after the "crucifixion of the seed":

> Above the ebb, that gray uprooted wall
> Was arch and chancel, choir and sanctuary,
> A solid round of stone and ritual.
> Knox brought all down in his wild Hogmanay.

[192] Ibid., p. 273.

The wave turns round. New ceremonies will thrust
From the thrawn acre where those good stones bleed
Like corn compelling sun and rain and dust
After the crucifixion of the seed.

Restore to that maimed rockpool, when the flood
Sounds all her lucent strings, its ocean dance;
And let the bronze bell nod and cry above
Ploughshare and creel; and sieged with hungry sins
A fisher priest offer our spindrift bread
For the hooked hands and harrowed heart of Love. ("Chapel...", *LaF*, p. 45)

4. The search for wholeness

Apart from the more religious connotations of redemption and "return", Muir's and Brown's search for wholeness and reconciliation is in the tradition of British and European Romanticism. Both saw at the heart of the creative life the dualistic play of complementary forces, a dynamism of opposites that can create a higher state of consciousness and self-awareness. In addition, Jung's thoughts about "visionary art" are recalled in Muir's *Scott and Scotland*: "the major forms of poetry rise from a collision between emotion and intellect on the plane where both meet on equal terms."[193] The creative imagination is seen to be nourished by contrary forces; however, in the end a fusion of opposites is sought. Talking about the dualism of thought and feeling, Muir held that the ultimate hope is to overcome the collision and achieve reconciliation:

> Poetry is not spontaneous in that it is restricted to the expression of simple and spontaneous feelings, but rather that in the sense that it reconciles the antitheses of feeling and thought into a harmony.[194]

Reconciliation is the theme of "The Journey Back" – and indeed the ultimate symbol of Muir's probing into the past and a beyond. The journey is brought to completion by embracing the belief in the immortality of the soul and is captured in the closing image of "the golden harvester", comprising the Christian idea of redemption and the platonic concept of perfection. Another poem that celebrates man's redemption through Christ is "The Transfiguration" with its triumphant image of the coming of Christ and a return to Eden:

> Then he will come, Christ, the uncrucified, [...]
> His agony unmade, his cross dismantled – [...]
> And Judas damned take his long journey backward
> From darkness into light and be a child
> Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
> Be quite undone and never more be done. ("The Transfiguration", *CP*, p. 200)

In the "The Annunciation" Muir deals with the concept of wholeness. Although the dualism of body and soul cannot be overcome in this life, he hopes that one day he will feel "whole":

> Whether the soul at first
> This pilgrimage began,
> Or the shy body leading
> Conducted soul to soul
> Who knows? This is the most
> That soul and body can,
> To make us each for each
> And in our spirit whole. ("The Annunciation", *CP*, p. 117)

[193] See Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, p. 35.
[194] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

In "The Bird" too, the hope for harmony on a plane beyond human existence is expressed. The poem shows Muir's belief in the continuity of life and the reconciliation of dualistic forces on a higher level where the human soul finds completion in a transcendent reality:

> The wide-winged soul itself can ask no more
> Than such a pure, resilient and endless floor
> For its strong-pinioned plunging and soaring and upward and
> upward springing. ("The Bird", *CP*, p. 120)

Yet, since reconciliation and redemption are not to be had cheaply, discontinuity and rupture are recurring ideas in Muir's poetry. What he felt very deeply and expressed most urgently was a sense of loss, isolation and suffering, continually juxtaposed with harmony, peace and reconciliation. Many of his poems, especially of the early years, depict destruction and its aftermath: the time after some great or terrible event, the endurance or patience or suffering of survivors, the fall of famous cities. His visions of Eden after the fall, Troy after it was sacked or the world after a nuclear war are attempts to deal with both personal as well as historical and political events that deeply disturbed him. In "Troy", Muir tried to come to terms with the sense of a fallen world. Although the aftermath of calamity is chosen and not the time of destruction itself, there is a peculiar horror to the situation as an old Trojan warrior, left over from the battle for Troy, lives in the sewers under the city and in his own heroic madness imagines the conquering of the Greeks, while he is in fact fighting the rats of Troy:

> And the wild Greeks yelled round him.
> Yet he withstood them, a brave, mad old man,
> And fought the rats forTroy.

When he is discovered by a band of robbers he is dragged to the surface:

> And there he saw Troy like a burial ground
> With tumbled walls for tombs, the smooth sward wrinkled
> As Time's last wave had long since passed that way,
> The sky, the sea, Mount Ida, and the islands,
> No sail from edge to edge, the Greeks clean gone.
> They stretched him on a rock and wrenched his limbs,
> Asking: "Where is the treasure?" till he died. ("Troy", *CP*, p. 71)

Muir's exploration of the platonist idea of a shadow world and the blurring of boundaries between reality and illusion, combined with the sense of the pointlessness of history dominated by arbitrary fate, is often pessimistic. Margery McCulloch argues that Muir, by turning to Greek myth and Greek gods, tried to come to terms with the Scottish equivalent of the deterministic philosophy of Calvinism. She points out that in the Greek myths, as in Calvinist theory, affairs are dominated not by the

actions of human beings but by the will of the powerful gods.[195] However, although the theme of destruction and the hopelessness of history was, particularly in the early poetry, never far from his mind, Muir's later works display a more positive view of human destiny, replacing his obsession with determinism with a more wholesome belief in a forgiving and loving God who allows for human choice and freedom.

In Brown's work there is a similar creative tension between dualisms. He too saw the world in terms of oppositions and strove to overcome them by a synthesising vision. Not surprisingly the search for a centre and for meaning is a striking feature of his work, coinciding with Muir's concerns:

Innocence	Experience
Childhood	Adult life
Tradition/ Culture (rituals, ceremonies, religious attempts to grasp nature and human existence	Nature (brute creation)
Emotion	Intellect
Spirit/Soul	Flesh/Body
Art/vision/dream	Life/reality/scientific knowledge
Outsider (artist)	Insider
Poetry (Power of words)	Limits of speech/Silence
Past	Present
Time	Timelessness/"the other side of time"
Voyage/Exile	Home/Return
Loss/Suffering	Redemption/Reconciliation/ Resurrection
Fragmentariness/unattainable vision	Wholeness

Interestingly, Brown's vision of the sack of Troy, as described in his poem "That Night in Troy", highlights a different mood although it is also concerned with loss and suffering.[196] He was able, perhaps due to his already established Catholicism, to juxtapose his faith in renewal and redemption to Muir's pessimism in "Troy".

[195] See M. McCulloch, *Edwin Muir. Poet, Critic and Novelist* (Edinburgh 1993), p. 15.
[196] See GMB, *Loaves and Fishes*, p. 10.

Perhaps in answer to Muir's poem, Brown turned to the classical Greek story in order to give expression to his own view of history and to his more positive understanding of human destiny. Although loss, destruction and suffering are vividly recalled, they are overcome by love. In his version there is a stronger spirit of endurance and renewal. Edwin Morgan thinks that in Muir "there is a strand of pessimism in his reflections on human destiny which his religious hope was never quite robust enough to dismiss".[197] In Brown's version, when Corydon, who lost three brothers in the war, and a girl from the temple, who lost her innocence meet, their first kiss promises a new beginning: "With their first kiss/ They sealed a resurrection for the city."

> The wind was fire; the streets hot funnels; women
> Went trailing lamentation round the walls
> Searching for father or husband or son who lay
> Churned in the rubble.[...]
>
> On a dark plinth
> (Its marble general toppled) Corydon crouched
> Glowing with agony for three tall brothers
> Broken beneath the wheels.
>
> A girl from the temple
> Where lust all day had knit
> Soldiers and vestals into sweating knots
> Under the images whose eyes were vacant,
> Stumbled upon him there.
> A crystal finger
> Tuned an invisible string.
> With their first kiss
> A ten years' vogue was out, and Paris died.
> Since one unbroken string can lure dead stones
> Into a solemn architectural dance
> And lead in order through the finished gate
> The horse, the wheel, the god, the golden corn,
> They sealed a resurrection for the city. ("That Night in Troy", *LaF*, p. 10)

Brown suggests that as long as there is only "one unbroken string" in the web of creation, as symbolised in the loving union of man and woman, "dead stones" can be "lured into a solemn dance" of life; through the gate the horse, the god, the golden corn are led – all being symbols of physical as well as spiritual life. The image of the golden corn represents the continuation of harvest cycles and life cycles. With the idea of the horse being part of the city's resurrection to new life, Brown hints at Muir's employment of the horse as a potent symbol of renewal in "The Horses", where their return as man's companions to pull ploughs, bear loads and make possible the rituals of harvest, has the power to change life: "Our life is changed; their coming our beginning."[198]Although "The Horses" is one of Muir's more positive

[197] See Edwin Morgan, "Edwin Muir", in Ian Hamilton (ed.), *The Modern Poet. Essays from "The Review"*(London 1968), p. 46.
[198] See Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems*, p. 247.

statements, there lingers the feeling that he is often closer to doubt than to certainty and that in Brown there is a stronger sense of assurance that all shall be well. From the point of view of symbolically reaching the end of a way and arriving at peace, Muir's work is less satisfying than Brown's. P. H. Butter has argued that this might have to do with Muir's being under the control of a much stronger self-critical intelligence than Brown's.[199]

However, not all of Brown's poems and stories end positively. In much of his work the sense of loss, suffering and separation can be dominant. Orkney, for instance, is frequently portrayed by Brown in a state of transition and change although he finds much permanence and pattern there. As Colin Manlove has pointed out "there is no settled assurance of community in Brown's stories; assurances, such as they are, are either violated or wrested with pain from shifting circumstance".[200] In Orkney, as in many parts of the world, attempts to make a secure life are continually thwarted. Catastrophes, wars, or the generally disastrous effects of progress are frequently recalled or captured in images like "Black Star" or "Black Pentecost". In "Dead Fires", Brown presents a picture of desolation:

> At Burnmouth the door hangs from a broken hinge
> And the fire is out. [...]
> And the hearth coldness [...]
> The poor and the good fires are all quenched.
> Now, cold angel, keep the valley
> From the bedlam and cinders of A Black Pentecost. ("Dead Fires", *SP*, p. 76 ff.)

Loss and loneliness are present in every shape. In "Sealskin" Brown describes the unhappy marriage of a seal-woman to a fisherman, and how she finally leaves. In other stories too relationships often break up or people end being stripped of friends, lovers or spouses and homes. Similarly, in *Magnus*, the imagery of garments, webs, folds, weavings and cycles which suggest continuity are counterpointed with images of tearing, division, rags, and separation. Man is self-divided by sin, the earldom is divided. The world is riven with dualities: "The body-spirit dichotomy, or the body-intellect dichotomy, is a bitter prideful cleaving of the wholeness of man's nature."[201] The school-children too become divided as men: "In the complex web of their relationships many strands had been severed, sometimes savagely."[202] At times nature herself and the necessities of life and procreation appear cruel and heartless. *Forresterhill* (1992) presents a sombre view of life:

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[199] See P. H. Butter, "George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir", p. 16.
[200] See Colin Manlove, *Modern Scottish Fantasy* (Edinburgh 1994), p. 182.
[201] See GMB, *Magnus*, p. 130.
[202] Ibid., p. 97.

Look for no company of goodly folk
No fellow pilgrims on that road.
Loneliness is all
And the bitter fruit of the selfhood of each man –
Shame, regret, fear, sorrow, rage. (*Forresterhill, SP,* p. 161)

Thus, the theme of the voyage (or sea-voyage) is not always a positive one; similar to the "restricted way-theme" in Muir a return or a way back is often thwarted. In "Voyager" the mood is one of exile and longing for a return. Like Muir's wanderer in "The Journey Back", Brown's voyager shares the wish "To seek my home".[203]

We had small luck
With the holy crosses, the halls
Of Gaelic chiefs.
All were empty, [...]
We sat hungry
Between a loch and a mountain
On the hundredth morning, under
The fourth moon.

Ragna, I write this
From an Irish village.
Are you still in the world,
I wonder [...] ?
I am a gray humped man.
I had to learn new speech long ago. [...]
After ten thousand mornings
Of rain, frost, larksong
How should I find a way back
To the waterfront of Trondheim? ("Voyager", *SP*, p. 122)

While Muir turned to Greek myth in order to express his ideas about human existence and the continuing striving for reconciliation, Brown turned to Norse sagas, stories and legends. Often he dealt with the human situation through the transformation or the retelling of the experience of a historical or saga-figure (as in "The five voyages of Arnor", "Eynhallow: Crofter and Monastery", "Culloden: The last battle", "Orkneymen at Clontarf, AD 1014", "The Abbot"). Several of the poems in *The Wreck of the Archangel* are about voyages and journeys inspired by Viking times and old Orkney lore, "crowded with sailors, merchants, adventurers, pilgrims, smugglers, whalers, storms and sea-changes".[204]

In *Fishermen with Ploughs*, where the elements of destruction and suffering are prevalent, Brown dealt with the question of whether life after a great war is possible. The conclusion is not a straightforward one; although he suggests that the only salvation for the world lies in the creation of a primitive agricultural community in the wake of a nuclear war, attempts to do so are unsuccessful. Because "the corn dies", the survivors have to go further back to a pre-agricultural stage: "from now on

[203] See Edwin Muir, "The Journey Back" (II), in *Collected Poems*, p. 171.
[204] See GMB, introduction to *The Wreck of the Archangel. Poems* (London 1989).

[...] people will be fishermen, and women who watch the sea."[205] Brown's contemplation of a nuclear war and the fate of survivors is reminiscent of Muir's "The Horses", one in a group of prophetic reflections on future war and destruction written in the 1950s. Other than in "The Last War", "After a Hypothetical War", or "The Day before the last Day", in this more hopeful poem Muir envisages a return to a primitive pastoral life which could restore man to human values. Having lost machines and tractors, men re-discover their old companions, the plough-horses, symbols of the world before the war. The parallels in the use of imagery between "The Horses" and *Fishermen with Ploughs* are not coincidental. Writing to Willa Muir Brown revealed that he was inspired by Muir's image of the tractor lying in the fields and the horses returning, "stubborn and shy" in Muir's version, and "delicate and shy" in his version:

> I'd spent a couple of years writing a group of poems about a lovely valley in the island of Hoy called Rackwick, imagining the lives of the people who lived there through the centuries [...] The problem was to round it off, which I did last week with 21 prose poems spoken by 7 women who return there after the world is in ruins. (Parts of it are like Edwin's marvellous poem "The Horses" – in fact I've used one of his great images, the tractor lying useless in the field and the horses returning, shyly.)[206]

Brown refers to a passage in which he recalls how the return of a mare and her foal promise a new beginning, "green corn", renewal of the long lost archaic companionship between men, animal and the land, and consequently, new life:

> First David had to dig with a spade. Not a single ox had come through The Black Flame. There was one old plough rusting in the bog. And of course the tractor that belonged to the first inhabitants, it was worse than useless; even the rats and birds kept away from it; the petrol smell clings about it, faintly, like a ghost of the last age. [...] one day when David was among the hills didn't two horses cross the heather towards him, very delicate and shy, shaggy garrons, a mare with a black mane spilling into the wind and her foal. And at last the mare came right up to him and fitted her skull into his warm welcoming hand. And then David led her and the snickering foal home to the plough and empty stable. [...] there's another ripeness in the world. Deep inside me a new heaviness stirs and sways, poised, the sea-begotten dancer.[207]

Brown shared with Muir a distrust of the effects of progress and the fear of catastrophe. Both poets seemed to feel that in the aftermath of a great war the only promise of survival lies in the return to an agricultural past, as is suggested in "The Horses": "We have gone back/ Far past our father's land." The radios in Muir's poem fail and are left silent; the tractors in the field are left to rust away. Both symbolise the failure of the "old bad world" and the refusal of the survivors to go back to mechanisation and technology:

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[205] See GMB, *Fishermen with Ploughs*, p. 98.

[206] See letters of GMB, 26/7/1967, in The National Library of Scotland, Acc 10557.

[207] See GMB, "The Return of the Women", in *Fishermen with Ploughs*, p. 89.

> On the second day
> The radios failed; we turned the knobs; no answer. [...]
> But now if they should speak,
> If on a sudden they should speak again, [...]
> We would not listen, we would not let it bring
> That old bad world that swallowed its children quick
> At one great gulp. We would not have it again. ("The Horses", *CP*, p. 246)

In the story "The Wireless Set", Brown's message is similar. Technology and machines are associated with death and destruction. Apart from Brown's ironic comments on the value of the radio which gives "unreliable weather-forecasts" and "constipation advertisements" the radio clearly belongs to the same "bad" world as it does in Muir's "The Horses". In the end, it stands "a tangled wreck, on the dresser".[208] Similarly, in Muir's "Petrol Shortage", the "planes are hunted from the sky"; as a result, the peaceful silence evokes a pastoral past. The poem is a statement of hope in renewal which is entirely in tune with Brown's conviction stated in "Chapel between Cornfield and Sea: Stromness" (*LaF*) that after physical and spiritual devastation of the land and its people, "The wave turns round. New ceremonies will thrust/ From the thrawn acre where those good stones bleed":

> The cycle will come round again,
> Earth will repair its broken day. ("Petrol Shortage", *CP*, p. 289)

Yet, unity of vision is under constant threat. Even though Muir believed that "Seen against eternity the life of man is a complete story"[209] and that he could cross the threshold and enter into an imaginative world, he was also aware of the limits of art and poetic speech. The sadness at being unable to "see life whole" prevails in "The Solitary Place":

> But I can never
> See with these eyes the double-threaded river
> That runs through life and death and death and life,
> Weaving one scene. ("The Solitary Place", *CP*, p. 81)

Muir felt that he had to strike a compromise since, from the outset, he was confronted with "the story that never can be told".[210] In the poem "In Love for Long", he attempted to "contrive a song/ for the intangible". Although the poet can give form and intensity to the visionary, and although he can commemorate his experience by shaping it into a poem there is something he must leave unsaid, a final mystery which defies poetic formulation. This is suggested in "Images I", a poem about a dream which he felt conveyed the deepest truth about the act of writing. Kathleen Raine recalls:

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[208] See GMB, "The Wireless Set", in *A Time to Keep*, p. 106.
[209] See Edwin Muir, *Essays on Literature and Society*, p. 148.
[210] See Edwin Muir, "The Bargain", in *Collected Poems*, p. 189.

> He once described to me a dream that at the time seemed to convey to him the deepest truth about writing. The dream was a very simple one: it consisted of a semicolon. The meaning of this semicolon, as it revealed itself to the dreamer, was that the poet never knows all that he writes; he writes only, as it were, as far as the semicolon; beyond the statement is something more, that completes his meaning. We can never define it, for it is not finite in its very nature; yet it is part of the poem, and part of what the poet communicates to the reader.[211]

It is silence that can speak, the missing word in the sentence, the "hiatus":

> Take one look at that face and go your way. [...]
> What you see there is something else than beauty.
> These are your lineaments, the face of life. [...]
> Look once. But do not hope to find a sentence
> To tell what you have seen. Stop at the colon:
> And set a silence after to speak the word
> That you will always seek and never find,
> Perhaps, if found, the good and beautiful end.
> You will not reach that place. So leave the hiatus
> There in the broken sentence. What is missing
> You will always think of. [...]
> All that you think or say will be a postscript
> To that imperfect mystery, limping sentence.
> And do not forget. ("Images I", *CP*, p. 260)

The observer must rely on the "imperfect mystery" of the "limping sentence", for there is nothing else he can think or say; all he can do is to rely on memory: "And do not forget". Thus, in the following, the poet speaks "in bewilderment" when he contemplates his task:

> And in bewilderment
> My tongue shall tell
> What mind had never meant
> Nor memory stored.
> In such bewilderment
> Love's parable
> Into the world was sent
> To stammer its word. [...]
>
> Heaven-sent perplexity –
> If thought should thieve
> One word of the mystery
> All would be wrong.
> Most faithful fantasy
> That can believe
> Its immortality
> And make a song. ("The Poet", *CP*, p. 286)

In order to get a hold of the ineffable he tries to "make a song". But stories, emblems, images and songs are only poor contrivances of the unutterable. "In Love for Long" affirms the unsayable by trying to grasp meanings beyond expression, attempting to "contrive a song for the intangible".

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[211] See Kathleen Raine, "Edwin Muir. An Appreciation", *Texas Quarterly* 4 (Autumn 1961), p. 234.

Brown was also aware of the limits of poetic speech. Being a Christian, believing that the poetic word is a "shadow" of the divine Word, he felt that he had to be willing to surrender his craftsmanship to the simplicities of his faith. Whether his Catholicism can be regarded as partly constitutive for his increasingly pared down poetic language in which the constitution of silence is seen as the true destiny of the poet will be discussed in chapter three. At any rate, *Following a Lark*, his last collection of poems, introduced by him as "poems written [...] to glorify [...] the Light behind the light, that gives meaning to all the creatures of the earth" suggests that his late poetry is a step further along the road to a liberation from words. Conveniently, the rune which fascinated Brown throughout his life is constitutive in the silencing of the word. Inspired by Norse sagas and their technique of using brevity and silence, he turned to the rune in his attempt at a "reductio ad silentium" of the word; for the rune strives towards the condition of a perfect poem: silence.

In an age where he felt there was "too much noise everywhere – transistors, pop-music, juke boxes", physical silence was important for Brown. In "The Wireless Set", as indeed in Muir's "Petrol Shortage" and "The Horses", the restoration of physical silence helps to evoke a pastoral, more wholesome past. It is suggested that silence makes possible the contemplation of what is meaningful. Naturally, Brown responded to Muir's use of heraldic imagery and its stillness and felt that: "No-one, reading the verse of Orkney's greatest poet Edwin Muir, can fail to see how he was a true Orkneyman, haunted by time and silence."[212] He adds that "It is the look of the islands that suggests heraldic stillness and a hoarded symbolism". The most exact symbol of the stillness and silence of the Orkney landscape he thought was heraldry: "In the silence an image out of the past stirs, and illuminates things in our present circumstances."[213] Brown also suggests a heraldic significance when he names things rather than describe them and when he places images like images on a shield of emblems: In the "Laird's Falcon", the likeness to a heraldic symbol is obvious:

> The falcon on the weathered shield
> Broke from his heraldic hover
> To drift like a still question over
> The fecund quarterings of the field. ("The Laird's Falcon", *SP*, p. 64)

For Brown, heraldry, as indeed stillness and silence, was highly mysterious and evocative. He felt that it is a form

> deeper than art or language by which a family or tribe pass on their most precious secrets, their lore of a kingdom lost. It is a stillness into which the torrents of history are gathered. [...] from

[212] See GMB, "A Writer in Orkney", MS (1970), in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1866/17.
[213] See GMB, An Orkney Tapestry, p. 19.

> its hands we take at last the wholesome images – the heart's bread – that our ancestors sowed for us in passion and blindness That quiet pool turns the millstones of religion, and of art.[214]

Talking about Muir and his evocations of silence he adds that "In a sense, all writing, my own included, aspires to the same condition of silence."[215] The idea that not only physical silence, but also meditative silence evokes feelings of transcendence and partaking in the whole is expressed in Muir when he suggests that the spiritual journey back is one done in silence and ends in a place of peace:

> An ever -winding and unwinding air
> That moves their feet though they in silence go,
> For music's self itself has buried there,
>
> And all its tongues in silence overflow
> That movement only should be melody.
> This is the other road, not that we know.
>
> This is the place of peace, content to be. ("The Journey Back", *CP*, p. 174)

This coincides with Brown's feelings since what appears to have been even more central to him than physical silence and stillness is its mediating and spiritual power. In his view, all poetry seeks silence. Significantly, in 1991 he defined poetry as a "contemplation of silence".[216] Elsewhere he asserted that "The next best thing to a perfect poem is silence. (But there is no perfect poem)".[217] Brown adds a kind of epilogue to his earlier thoughts of the poet's task as "interrogation of silence" when, in "A Work for Poets", he liberates himself from the vane quest for "The Word":

> To have carved on the days of our vanity
> A sun
> A ship
> A star
> A cornstalk
>
> Also a few marks
> From an ancient forgotten time
> A child may read
>
> That not far from the stone
> A well
> Might open for wayfarers
>
> Here is a work for poets –
> Carve the runes
> Then be content with silence ("A Work for Poets", *FaL*, p. 86)

Brown certainly shared Eliot's belief that "Words after speech, reach into the Silence".[218] In this sense, it was the rune as an early art-form or pattern (which is

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[214] Ibid.
[215] See GMB, "A Writer in Orkney", MS (1970).
[216] See GMB, interview with D. Annwn, in "Correspondences", in *Poetry Wales* 27 (1991), p. 19.
[217] See GMB, questionnaire to D. J. Jones, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 2029/9/1, 1-9.
[218] See T. S. Eliot, "The Four Quartets", Burnt Norton V: "Words, after speech, reach/ Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,/ Can words or music reach/ The stillness" (*CP*, p. 194).

more than just a symbol of Brown's identification with the emblem of the bardic or skaldic) that seemed even more apt to summon up the kind of silence and stillness that he tried to capture. He regarded it as a key which could open the doors of the labyrinth of existence and lead back to the silence surrounding the Word. In "Four Poems for Edwin Muir" he symbolically completes Muir's quest for the "beginnings" when he contemplates the possibility of a return to Eden for the "lost child", suggesting that it can be achieved through the art, silence and stillness he saw in the rune:

> Someone went in at the door of the green hill.
> There the harp is,
> Carved in stones among skulls and bronze helmets. That rune will unlock
> Time's labyrinth, door after door.
> To the tree and the apple. ("Four Poems for Edwin Muir:...", *WoA*, p. 84)

Brown was delighted by the harp's religious connotations and his contemplation of it as a key to salvation, redemption and return demonstrates his belief that all art (symbolised by the rune) is bound up with the religious and has a "healing" quality. His ambition to create verse that aspires to the condition of silence has a deeply spiritual and religious character and is part of his wish to evoke the silence that surrounds the Creation and the Word. This further explains his fascination with the Catholic Mass:

> At Dalkeith and Edinburgh I began to go to Mass occasionally; it was at the time, soon to end, when the mass was still conducted in the majesty and beauty of Latin and punctuated by marvellous silences. The whole history of man – what is to come as well what has been – is caught up in that brief ceremony at the altar. "In principio erat verbum" – the last syllable, at the end of time, will round out the meaning. Meantime we content ourselves with hints and guesses.[219]

In this sense, Eliot's "constitution of silence" became an act of faith in Brown. His works are spiritual probings into silence, aspiring towards something that Muir identified as grace: "real natural grace which is so absent from poetry just now and which poetry needs so much".[220]

[219] See GMB, autobiographical essay, MS (Dec. 1986 - Jan. 1987), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 1355.1
[220] See Edwin Muir, foreword to *The Storm and Other Poems* (Kirkwall 1954).

Chapter III

"Sifted to suit our sight": The Word as Sacrament in Gerard Manley Hopkins and George Mackay Brown

1. Introduction

Although Brown-scholarship has been slow in developing, the relative lack of attention to the literary relationship between Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) and George Mackay Brown is extraordinary since Hopkins had a profound effect on Brown, both on a personal and aesthetic level, substantially stimulating his religious and creative imagination. Critics and scholars have mentioned Hopkins' name in connection with Brown's work but the acknowledgement of his importance has hitherto remained limited to a few isolated remarks that suggest affinity and indebtedness.[1] Contributing to this neglect might be the tendency among critics and scholars to avoid influence-studies of a writer's work because such studies are considered old-fashioned. A further reason might be the perceived dissimilarity of both poets' works. The surface structure and the tone of their poetry seem diametrically opposed to each other. On first reading there is little in Brown's poetry that resembles the passionate, seemingly unrestrained, breathless, often unpunctuated, elliptical and compressed alliterative style of Hopkins' best known poems. Brown is different from Hopkins in several respects. He does not adhere as strictly as Hopkins does to conventional metrical forms and writes mostly in free verse. Although he believed that every poet or writer ought to learn the proper "craft" of poetry and even though he enjoyed experimenting with its different techniques and styles, he was not preoccupied with the more technical aspects of it, whereas Hopkins was fascinated by poetic theory as his journals, papers and lecture notes show.[2] Moreover, Brown did not focus on physical and natural beauty or the complex

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[1] David Annwn remarked about Brown that the "vitality of Gerard Manley Hopkins' religious vision also makes itself felt in his work", but he does not elucidate what this entails. See David Annwn, *Inhabited Voices*, p. 1.

[2] Brown pointed out that he rarely counted syllables when writing poetry. He enjoyed quoting poetry with friends but he hardly ever discussed techniques or styles with them: "Thought and discussion are in a way obstacles to the flow of poetry and to its enjoyment". See questionnaire by Kevin Perryman, 16/1/1986, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2845.1. Elsewhere, in a letter to Marwick he admits: "I'm beginning to fear that my interest in ideas fatally overbalances my interest in language." See Kirkwall Archive, letters to E. W. Marwick, 31/6: 1937-1961, letter undated, written most certainly in 1947.

subjective feelings it arouses in the way that Hopkins did and he hardly wrote about external nature or landscape for their own sake. Brown's poetry is less descriptive than Hopkins' and when he does describe a nature scene or an object he is far less wordy. His art is minimalist; he draws a sketch where Hopkins creates a Pre-Raphaelite painting. Unlike Hopkins' deeply emotional and devotional poetry, the texture of Brown's poetry is much tougher, terse, understated, restrained and "impersonal", his cadences are quieter, his imagination vivid, but expressed in a less extrovert way and he is hardly ever confessional.[3] Brown's struggles for expression do not appear to be as acute or involve the same amount of distress as do Hopkins'. Compared to what Elisabeth Huberman called "an organ blast of praise and delight", when commenting on Hopkins' poetry, the experience of reading a poem by Brown is different.[4] His music is more delicate and more like a simple chant; it is quiet and humble, rather than majestic, although no less joyful in intent.

There are further problems in establishing a common ground for a discussion of both poets. The precise influence that Gerard Manley Hopkins had on Brown is, compared to Muir's, less easily quantifiable since Hopkins and Brown were not contemporaries. Obviously, Brown did not share Hopkins' immediate social and cultural background as he did, temporarily at least, with Muir, who became his mentor and friend. Another difficulty lies in isolating Hopkins' influence from other literary stimuli since Brown was absorbing the works of many writers such as Muir, Eliot, Yeats, Spender, Auden and Dylan Thomas[5] as well as of writers belonging to the Scottish Renaissance of the inter-war years whose ideology he partly shared.[6] However, what we do know is that Brown was so taken with Hopkins that he decided to spend two years of in-depth study on the poet and his works while a postgraduate student at Edinburgh University from 1962 to 1964. As to the reasons for his choice Brown suggests in his autobiography:

> Hopkins' collected poems are probably the fewest in English literature; and I had no intention of immersing myself in the immensities of Pope's *Essay on Man*, or Wordsworth's *Prelude* [...] It was essential to choose a writer of small output.[7]

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[3] Brown once pointed out that he disliked confessionalist poetry very much. See David Annwn, "Correspondences", in *Poetry Wales* 27, no. 2 (1991), p. 19.

[4] See Elisabeth Hubermann, *The Poetry of Edwin Muir* (Oxford 1971), p. 132.

[5] Brown called them "major influences". See "Hamnavoe Revisited", in *Chapman* 84, p. 22.

[6] Douglas Gifford has pointed out that Brown's presentation of Orkney life, past and present, as an elemental expression of life itself, as well as the Renaissance idealism concerning fundamental ruralism and the discovery of the self in relation to history and folk mythology, which he shared with Scottish Renaissance writers such as Muir, Neil Gunn, Lewis Grassic Gibbon or Naomi Mitchison, make him a "child of that renaissance". See "Appreciation" in *The Scotsman*, 15/4/1996.

[7] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 149-150.

Practical though this may have been, Brown's preference for Hopkins also indicates how much he was attracted by the man and his poetry. He admired Hopkins' poetry "enormously"[8] and in his autobiography he provides further clues as to why:

> I had always loved Hopkins' poetry, and I was eager to know how he forged and hammered and welded those resounding marvels. [...] No English poet ever fell upon the language with such skill, sweetness and boisterous daring.[9]

After having devoted himself to studying Hopkins' poetry Brown left Edinburgh University in 1964. Unfortunately he did not produce a thesis which could clarify what he was trying to achieve with his research or what the exact nature of his attraction to Hopkins was. In an interview with Bob Tait and Isobel Murray Brown indicated that he was fascinated by Hopkins' bold and creative handling of language and his attempts to weld together, in one concentrated image, all essential characteristics of an object. However, although he enjoyed studying the texture of Hopkins' language and the style of his diction, he found his theories on rhythm and "sprung", "rising", "falling", "rocking", "counterpointed" and "outriding" feet, as well as his formal discipline of counting syllables and scanning his verse less interesting[10]: "It [the formal and technical aspect] wasn't rewarding for me at all, [...]. But I really enjoyed the poems very much. Looking at them in depth like that."[11] It is unfortunate too that Brown's postgraduate essays on aspects of Hopkins which he kept in "a cupboard upstairs [...] sheathed in cobwebs" at the time the autobiography was written (1985) have disappeared, so that nothing remains of his appraisal of Hopkins but a few scattered remarks.[12] Possibly Brown himself destroyed these papers; in a letter to Alan Bold in 1976 he commented that he did not think literary criticism to be his line:

> I didn't have any intentions of doing a PhD. [...] What remains is a collection of essays and sketches on different aspects of Hopkins' poetry: not good, literary criticism is not my line. [13]

Elsewhere he asserted:

> I have none of the qualities of a scholar – so look for no monumental tombs on Hopkins, with copious footnotes. [...] If he infects me with some of his sweet clear spirit, that's all I ask.[14]

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[8] See *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 17.
[9] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 150.
[10] In the "Author's Preface" to his *Poems* (1876-1880), Hopkins gives detailed instructions on how to scan and read his poems aloud; symbols such as loops, pauses and twirls indicate stress, "ove-reaving" of rhyme and lines, length of syllables, counterpointed feet etc.
[11] See *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 18.
[12] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 157-158.
[13] See GMB, reply to Alan Bold, 21/11/1976, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 2029/9/2, 1-13.
[14] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 12/10/1962.

As to the time of Brown's first acquaintance with Hopkins' verse little is known. Given the marked influence that the Newbattle-period and Muir had on shaping Brown's career and helping him to focus on and develop his literary tastes, one wonders what kind of role Muir played in mediating Hopkins' poetry. Muir's reviews and studies certainly helped to shape the public response to the Victorian poet in the 1930s and early '40s. He reviewed the *Notebooks*, the *Further Letters*, and *Gerard Manley Hopkins. Journals, Essays and Sermons*, and for *The Present Age from 1914* (1939) he wrote a survey of contemporary poetry, devoting half of it to the works of Yeats, Pound, Eliot and Hopkins. In a review for *The Scotsman* he was appreciative of Hopkins' writings. "On the Origin of Beauty", an essay which Hopkins is supposed to have written for Walter Pater while an undergraduate at Oxford, Muir regarded as a fragment "of the utmost interest". He recognised two things in Hopkins: that he had "an unusually profound grasp of the theory of poetry" as well as "executive powers quite unique in his time". His praise of Hopkins' platonic dialogue on beauty goes even further when he concludes:

> He has written more profound things about poetry, but nothing more lucid and comprehensive than this early dialogue, which should be used as a textbook wherever the appreciation of poetry is taught. [...] It is a pity that this dialogue seems to have been unfinished.[15]

Whether Muir used Hopkins' writings as part of his own teaching of English is not clear.[16] Neither in the remaining letters to, nor in his essays on Muir does Brown mention him as an influence in his appreciation of Hopkins. However it is safe to say that from the point of view of the theory and language of poetry Muir treated Hopkins as a major poet whose influence on modern poetry he regarded as "almost comparable" to that of Pound and Eliot:

> Hopkins was first of all a poet of natural genius, with a purely sensuous apprehension of words such as many greater poets have not had, and an astonishing capability to render by means of them the palpable shape, colour and feeling of the objects they described. This is perhaps Hopkins's most extraordinary single gift.[17]

More discriminating in this study for *The Present Age from 1914* (1939) than in his reviews, Muir – though recognising Hopkins' role in shaping the modern poetic heritage – was aware of how difficult it was to "estimate yet how great a poet Hopkins was". He concludes that "He has probably been overestimated because of his extraordinary mastery of the technique of verse and his genius for language."[18]

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[15] See E. Muir, "Gerard Manley Hopkins. Journals, Essays and Sermons", in *The Scotsman*, 4/2/1937.
[16] Brown was certainly familiar with Hopkins' work when he was at Newbattle. He recalled: "We students wrote, recited Shelley and Yeats and Hopkins in the crypt after an evening of beer at the Justinlees bar at Eskbank." See GMB, "The Seven Ages of Man", in *The Scotsman*, 30/8/1986.
[17] See Edwin Muir, *The Present Age from 1914* (London 1939), p. 87.
[18] Ibid., p. 92.

Muir was also doubtful of the merit of Hopkins' theory and practice of sprung rhythm, and he made it clear that he did not share Hopkins' orthodox Christianity.[19] Although his later poetry was inspired by a religious impulse, Muir remained first and foremost a humanist and was concerned with religious questions only insofar as they were relevant for ordinary human life.[20] For his taste, Hopkins showed

> little objective concern with ordinary human life. In poems like "Harry Ploughman", Harry is merely a selection of the physical universe [...]. The pathos is the pathos of "his mould of man", of natural decay like that of a tree. Hopkins clearly knew very little about Harry Ploughman and Felix Randal as human beings, except on this plane, and perhaps cared to know very little about them. His letters show that he could make the most acute common-sense judgements on other people; but his imagination was never animated by them. He has been called the greatest of his age, greater than Browning and Tennyson; but as a poet he had nothing to say about a province of experience on which Tennyson said much, and Browning much more: That is the life of ordinary human beings. One has the feeling that his religion was the complement of his sensuality, not of a conviction of Original Sin, which in a religious man is the key to understanding of human nature, as distinct from nature. Nature and God, and God in Nature, are Hopkins's themes. But on human life he had astonishingly little to say, perhaps because he was cut off from his age, and simultaneously from the world. He was a great poet, but he has probably been judged to be greater than he was.[21]

The extent to which Muir was an incentive for Brown to study Hopkins in more depth must remain open to debate.

Whatever Muir's thoughts on him, there were other influential forces that shaped Brown's approach to Hopkins. The general literary climate and the long-lasting effects of Hopkins' reception in the twentieth century created a fertile ground for poets such as Brown to draw on traditions initiated or carried on by the Victorian poet and taken up by poets in the 1930s, '40s and '50s. Although Hopkins did not invent all the elements that distinguish his work, their combination and the extent to which they are used form a characteristic and unusual style. The presence of his new prosody and his innovations in form and technique gave many poets greater freedom in their own poetic practice. Commenting on a Hopkins exhibition that he visited in Oxford, Brown praised the freshness and originality of Hopkins' poems, which he thought were "unlike poems written in English before, or ever will be again, so daring and revolutionary they are in imagery and technique".[22]

The devices that inform Hopkins' peculiar style are derived from a range of sources which it is not my intention to explore in detail since this has been done elsewhere.[23] A brief summary of its characteristics will suffice here: The use of

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[19] Ibid., p. 89.

[20] This is demonstrated in Muir's reply to a letter by Alec Aitken on his broadcast talk "The Decline of the Imagination", 28/6/1951, in P. H. Butter (ed.), *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, p. 159.

[21] See Edwin Muir, *The Present Age from 1914*, pp. 92-93.

[22] See GMB, "Gerard Manley Hopkins", in *Rockpools and Daffodils* (Edinburgh 1992), 22/6/1989.

[23] See for instance W. H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Study of Poetic Idiosyncracy in*

alliteration and assonance are important agents of patterning and cohesion in his verse and are partly derived from the Welsh technique of consonant chime called "cynghanedd", and partly from Old English verse, with the use of internal rhyme. Typical of his verse is also the use of repetition, the use of inversion, expressive pauses with exclamation marks, the large number of interjections, question marks and exclamations which associate his poetry with speech, notably direct speech in a state of excitement. Hopkins is also well known for his frequent use of elliptical or highly compressed syntax as in "Mine, O thou Lord of Life, send my roots rain". His use of compound words, dialect and antique words and hyphenated epithets and names is part of his desire to compress into the poetry as much meaning as it will bear (e.g. "leafmeal", being a compound of piecemeal and leafmould meaning a combination of these two – leaves, leaf by leaf, rotting piece by piece; see "Spring and Fall"). His sprung rhythm fulfils the same sort of need as his esemplastic syntax and compound words in that it enables him to concentrate in a line as much meaning as he wishes it to hold. For Hopkins, sprung rhythm was the natural form for heightened speech and had much in common with the expressive colloquial forms and rhythms of nursery rhymes. The varying of the number of syllables in the line while the stresses remain fairly constant is in keeping with his attempt to use the common language heightened.[24]

Hopkins was not the only poet who can be credited with having initiated a "new" way of writing or of having developed a new poetic style at the end of the last century. The departure from the old standard metre in English poetry and the development of free verse certainly owes as much to the Imagists and the French Symbolists or to the unmeasured verse of Walt Whitman as it does to Hopkins. W. H. Gardner points out that free verse was a natural development from the unmeasured verse of Whitman and Arnold.[25] Drawing on this, Desmond Egan clarifies Hopkins' position and his influence on the development of twentieth-century poetry:

> When Whitman introduced free verse into poetry he showed a revolutionary break with the syllable-stress tradition; Hopkins, however, showed how to combine freedom from the formality of the past with a sense of structure. The whole development of twentieth-century poetry traces back to these two progenitors.[26]

Relation to Poetic Tradition, 2 vols. (London 1944; 2nd ed. 1962); also Norman Weyand (ed.), *Immortal Diamond: Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1949).

[24] For a detailed consideration of Hopkins' language and his heightening of ordinary speech on a phonetic, lexical and syntactic level see James Milroy, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1977), espec. Part II.

[25] See W. H. Gardner, vol I, chapter 7,"Hopkins and Modern Poetry", p. 250.

[26] See Desmond Egan, "Hopkins' Influence on Poetry", quoted in M. E. Allsopp and D. A. Downes (eds.), *Saving Beauty. Further Studies in Hopkins* (London and New York 1994), p. 296.

Even more than 40 years after his death, and more than 15 years after the publication of his poems, Hopkins was still felt to have a bearing on contemporary poetry. The craze for him began in Oxford and Cambridge just before 1930 when the second edition of his poems appeared. The fashion for him continued well into the 1930s and 1940s when he was considered a "modernist" in spirit.[27] By the 1930s Hopkins had become a major force in the shaping of the poetic heritage, nourishing the work of many modern poets and writers. Poets such as W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and Dylan Thomas experimented with and imitated Hopkins' style and techniques. As this trend went on, C. Day Lewis, in 1934, saw in Hopkins the basis for a new poetic movement,[28] and in 1936 Babette Deutsch featured Hopkins in *This Modern Poetry*, referring to him as a contemporary in his violent psychological struggles.[29] Four years earlier, F. R. Leavis had argued the case for Hopkins' consideration as a major "contemporary" poet whose technique had a special bearing on the problems of contemporary poetry.[30] Although the publication of Hopkins' poems had been delayed until 1918 and their reception had been slow, there followed a passionate phase of imitating and experimenting with his style; subsequently, attempts were made to evaluate and place his works within the twentieth-century context. The phase of appreciation and evaluation was over by the 1940s and was followed by a more systematic explication and elucidation of his life and works, and more importantly, by considerations of his influence on modern poetry. Although the Hopkins vogue had almost passed by the late 1940s, Hopkins was closer to the hearts and to the spirit of many twentieth-century poets than one might expect from a Victorian poet. When Brown was introduced to him his legacy was still alive in the poetry of the '40s and '50s, and his influence on modern writing was by then being reflected and critically assessed.[31] Even if not immediately influencing the young poets of the '50s and '60s, Hopkins was a major force in shaping the literary heritage, and his cadences and rhythms lived on in the works of Dylan Thomas and David Jones to mention but two.[32]

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[27] See Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist poetry* (London 1927).
[28] See C. Day Lewis, *A Hope for Poetry* (Oxford 1934), especially p. 71.
[29] See Babette Deutsch, *This Modern Poetry* (London 1936).
[30] See F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London 1932), p. 156. Leavis also held that "No one can come from studying his work without an extended notion of the resources of English" (ibid.).
[31] David Daiches considers Hopkins' influence on the modern poets in *New Literary Values*, (Edinburgh and London 1936), Ch.1; another comprehensive survey of Hopkins' influence on modern poets up to date appeared in 1944 in W. H. Gardner, "Hopkins and modern poetry"; also see Richard F. Giles (ed.), *Hopkins among the Poets. Studies in Modern Responses to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ontario 1985); et al.
[32] Incidentally, Dylan Thomas, one of Brown's favourite poets, was himself strongly influenced by Hopkins. For more on the literary relationship of Dylan Thomas and Gerard Manley Hopkins see Jacob Korg, "Hopkins and Dylan Thomas" in *Hopkins among the Poets*, pp. 91-94.

2. GMB and GMH: Poet and Priest or Art and Sacrament

While absorbing a number of different stimuli from his immediate literary background and the works of influential poets such as Eliot, Yeats and Pound, Brown's personal and artistic search for meaning also made him look for ideas and traditions that suited his needs. His decision to apply at Edinburgh University to do research on Hopkins' poetry was part of this process.[33] Judging from Brown's own comments, the reasons for his attraction to Hopkins were twofold (one being more linguistic in nature, the other being more spiritual): First of all Hopkins appealed to him as a poet with a different and challenging attitude towards language ("no English poet ever fell upon the language with such skill [...] and boisterous daring"). Having inherited part of the modernist spirit and Eliot's and Yeats' ways of developing symbolist traditions and ideas about language and poetry, Brown was looking for new ways of poetic expression. His fascination with words naturally made him sensitive to Hopkins' extraordinary language. He admired his fresh and original experiments with the potential of words as well as his technical adventures with rhythm and prosody. Secondly, Brown was interested in Hopkins, the Catholic priest and his singular vision, or what he called "his sweet clear spirit". As Brown admitted in one of his weekly articles for *The Orcadian*, he was profoundly touched by "the spirit of such a great and humble man".[34] He had discovered similarities in his thought and sensibility with those of this "strange shy passionate tormented poet"[35] whose work was, like his own, grounded on and given meaning by a deeply spiritual outlook on life. Douglas Gifford confirms that there is a similarity between the two poets when he remarks:

> After Muir, the influence of Hopkins can be seen as seminal for Brown. Both poets share an astonishing clarity and sureness of imagery, and a refusal to join fashionable movements or to exploit the current styles; and both insist on a central spiritual dynamic through their work, stressing and shaping all that they write.[36]

The second part of Gifford's comment is crucial for a discussion of Hopkins' and Brown's work: the spiritual impulse and the religious spirit that nourished their creative imagination. Brown, who had been searching for spiritual values and religious affirmation since his adolescence, felt an affinity with Hopkins which became significant for his poetic, personal and spiritual development.

Before analysing the deeper nature of this spiritual kinship and the double impact that Hopkins had on Brown, there are some general similarities and affinities

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[33] The more spiritual side of this search made him consider conversion to Catholicism in 1961.
[34] See *Rockpools and Daffodils*, 22/6/1989.
[35] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 156.
[36] See Douglas Gifford, "Appreciation. George Mackay Brown", in *The Scotsman*, 15/4/1996.

between the poets which will help explain Brown's personal fascination with Hopkins. Both men were converts to the Roman Catholic Church and for both poets it was religion that became the foundation of their vision of life. Both poets have been called religious poets. Like Hopkins, though not to the same extent, Brown produced poetry that is Catholic to a degree that requires of readers who do not share his beliefs some measure of co-operation and trust, if not some religious assent. Like Hopkins, Brown employs religious imagery, deals with biblical and Christian themes, often speaks of Christ (either directly or indirectly) and endows his images with sacramental values. However, the religious spirit that animated both poets' work was not a feeble thing that simply served as a source of rich images and symbols. On the contrary, their Catholicism was an intensely conscious and deeply-felt faith. Accordingly their conversion to the Catholic Church (in 1866 and 1961) was not an easy step but the outcome of many years of prolonged and agonising thought; – their inclination towards Roman Catholicism having been made more difficult by the predominantly Anglican or Presbyterian and anti-Catholic environment in which they had grown up.[37] Moreover, due to their tendency to write religious verse, both poets faced similar difficulties. For Hopkins, to write vital religious verse and to attempt to purify degraded symbols in the late nineteenth century – the lag-end of an age divided into insensitive materialism on the one hand, and emotional pietism on the other – was itself a problem. In a similar way Brown was exposed to criticism due to his holistic tendencies and his Catholicism which seemed to clash with the sensibility of an age that he himself identified as being less interested in religion.[38] Moreover, Brown's vision culminating in the Christian hope of resurrection, as well as other holistic strivings, have received little support from critics and readers who share the post-modernist denial of totality, wholeness, unity of being or meaning.[39]

Apart from these biographical coincidences and affinities that provide a similar ground for both poets' spiritual growth there is another fact about Hopkins that appealed to Brown: Hopkins was not only a Catholic but a Jesuit priest, trained to a life of austerity and self-denial. This made him particularly interesting as Brown

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[37] Hopkins' conversion almost led to a split with his family; similarly Brown's conversion to Catholicism made him part of a denomination in Orkney that is in the minority, a fact that Schoene thinks contributed to his position within the Orkney community as that of a "radical outsider". See *The Making of Orcadia*, p. 266.

[38] In *For the Islands I sing* Brown deplores that "most people nowadays will have nothing to do with that [religion and the Catholic Mass]" (p. 185).

[39] Of late, French post-structuralism reinforced Roland Barthes' claim that the death of the author ultimately implies the death of God, thereby denouncing totality as a metaphysical mirage, or a bourgeois illusion. Derrida for instance has forcefully argued that in our effort to penetrate the endless play of de-totalised realities we come across not "wholes" but "holes" which in turn require further explorations.

disclosed in an interview with Bob Tait and Isobel Murray: "there is something about them, Jesuits, I like them very much."[40] The vocation of priest too was something Brown was fascinated by as his personal correspondence indicates. Commenting about Newbattle Abbey College in 1956 he told E. W. Marwick: "I am perfectly happy. I only wish it was 600 years ago, so that I could have taken vows and become a monk."[41] Almost ten years earlier in the late 1940s when he was familiarising himself with John Henry Newman's and various other accounts of conversions to Roman Catholicism, he was so profoundly touched by Catholicism and the possibility of his own conversion that he wrote to Marwick: "Tell Mrs. Marwick that she might see me a priest some day yet."[42] Possibly this would have suited Brown's nature since – not unlike John Henry Newman or Gerard Manley Hopkins – he was a solitary and a deeply personal man who was also sociable with many life-long friends, but was not a man for the crowd.

In these solitary moods Brown suffered bouts of melancholy. In bad times he suffered from depression. This disposition also makes him akin to Hopkins, the "shy and tormented poet" in whom he may well have seen himself at times. Hopkins' "Terrible Sonnets" testify to his time of despair and desolation in 1865/6, "that year of now-done darkness". In his autobiography, Brown describes a similar tendency to experience such "dark nights of the soul" when exposed to more severe depression or what he called "Hopkinesque angst":

> For two decades Wordsworthian hauntings, Hopkinesque angsts, have visited from time to time, and then for a week or more there is a depression to be endured. So severe it can be that one longs for oblivion, [...].[43]

His autobiography also suggests that his being diagnosed as suffering from tuberculosis when he was in his late teens as well as suicidal tendencies[44] and other tragic events in his family (suicide of one of his brothers in the late '40s; death of his father when Brown was still a young man), must have contributed to his emotional distress and certainly imparted to his search for spiritual values and affirmation an

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[40] See *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 19.

[41] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 8/5/1956. Many of Brown's stories and poems show that monks and their way of life fascinated him. The world of the cloister is frequently shown to be single-minded, full of simplicity whereas the world is manifold and complex. It is an enclosure where troubled souls gather and seek a world that is not mingled with the corruptions of society and which, being undistracted, makes possible meditation and contemplation. Certainly, Brown experienced his time at Newbattle as such an idealised time. Even Muir wrote to Brown that there was some "faint air of Eden about the place". At any rate, the dualism of the world and the cloister, worldly and sacred life is a recurring element in Brown's work.

[42] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 26/4/1947.

[43] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 184.

[44] Ibid.; about his mid-twenties Brown wrote: "in my late teens, I had had the death wish – and so intensely that it destroyed a part of my lungs" (p. 64).

even greater urgency and intensity "at a time when 'easeful death' seemed the more likely way".[45]

Brown also shared something with Hopkins that was truly contemporary for a Victorian poet: the sense of what is now called ecology. Both poets' work shows a deep concern for nature and the environment. Hopkins regarded the pollution of the environment, the effects of modern industrialism and the destruction of the beauty of nature not only as a physical but also as a spiritual threat, indeed a threat to religious faith since it was in nature and the landscape that he believed God's presence was revealed. To him all nature was sacramental, the outward sign of the presence of Christ. Consequently, the destruction of nature and human dignity meant that ways of perceiving and experiencing God in the everyday immediate environment were undermined. To the extent that he shared concerns about the destruction of the environment and its effects on people's spiritual well-being Brown can be seen as working in the same tradition as Hopkins, showing a deep concern for issues that, especially in the late twentieth century, had reached a level of even greater urgency ("All is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil"[46]). For Hopkins it was faith in God's grandeur with which He had "charged" the world that helped him to trust that "nature is never spent". This sense of hope accords with Brown's own faith in renewal and continuation and is at the heart of everything that he has written. Thus, it is not surprising that he refers to Hopkins when, in an article for *The Orcadian* in which he discusses pollution and the ongoing destruction of nature, he asks his readers not to despair and to trust that all shall be well:

> 100 years ago the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, troubled by the pollution of industrial England, consoled himself with the certainty that "there lives the dearest freshness deep down things".

Drawing on Hopkins, Brown concludes his essay by inviting his readers to share his and Hopkins' faith:

> We must have faith that somewhere, deep down at the very root and sources of life, there is an endless upsurge of health and renewal.[47]

Hopkins' example confirmed for Brown that it was the perennial task of any artist or poet to face ecological and social issues in their works since these cannot be seen as being separate from the spiritual life or a wholesome value-system. Far from being otherworldly or backward, – and again conjuring up Hopkins and his image of the

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[45] Ibid., p. 62.

[46] See Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur", poem no. 31, p. 70; in Robert Bridges (ed.), *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 3rd edition (London et al. 1948). Subsequent references to Hopkins' poems refer to this edition.

[47] See GMB, "The Dearest Freshness", in *Letters from Hamnavoe* (Edinburgh 1975), 23/3/1972.

"wet and wildness" in his poem "Inversnaid" – Brown tells his readers and other poets that:

> Pollution, nuclear power, overfishing, the continuing destruction of the wild and wet beautiful places, and the unique creatures that share our habitat, our fellow mortals: These are plenty of challenges for present-day islanders to face and resolve. Writers and artists ought to be in the forefront of the struggle.[48]

Since

> What would the world be, once bereft
> of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,
> O let them be left, wildness and wet;
> Long live the weeds and the wildness yet. ("Inversnaid", poem no. 56)

Brown evoked Hopkins as the kind of poet who tried to preserve and celebrate what was threatened both on a physical and spiritual level. This task of remembering, celebrating and preserving the "pure sources", – whether to be understood as Muir's Eden, "a pure racial inheritance going right back to the Creation"[49], or Hopkins' "immortal diamond"[50] – is what Brown felt to be his task too.

[48] See GMB, "The Art of Narrative", MS (14/1/1988), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3112.8.
[49] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 26.
[50] See *Poems of GMH*, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire...", no. 72, p. 111.

2.1 The Poet: "Purifying the language of the tribe"

poetry is emphatically speech, speech
purged of dross like gold in the furnace (GMH) [51]

What attracted Brown to Hopkins was his searching spirit and his commitment to "keeping the sources pure". Dealing with words and considering them as the social bond of society, Hopkins believed that poets had to defend the language and keep it in good order. Brown appreciated that

> his life and writing was a seeking for the sources of things, from which new life springs perpetually to renew the earth that is forever being soiled and filthied by industrialism and the wounds that men inflict on the environment. To this work of cleansing he had to throw away the old worn moulds of language, and mint words and images as if they were being used for the first time.[52]

In his work of "cleansing" Hopkins was concerned with the very medium of poetry: language. Brown was impressed by his power with words and his attitude to language: "It was an immediate, instinctive attraction. It was the new way that he did things, and the strangeness and vividness of it."[53] Hopkins demonstrated to Brown the importance of discipline and precision within the verse. Preoccupied with form and strictness, he resisted the contemporary tendency to lengthy and formless effusiveness and thought that the merit of a poem may well lie "in its terseness".[54] Being aware that ordinary language was often imprecise and lifeless, he attempted to restore some accuracy to it in the use of words. In a letter to Robert Bridges he briefly discusses the image of "shook foil" in his poem "God's Grandeur":

> I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel, and no other word whatever will give the effect I want.[55]

"No other word whatever" – this attitude and the search for the precise and uncompromising meaning of words is typical of Hopkins and his sense of his craft. He admired plain speech and language that could capture in word or phrase the exact nature or essence of something: "I dearly love calling a spade a spade."[56] In many cases this involved seeing the object afresh (de-familiarising it), and rendering it as exactly and freshly as possible often necessitated a wide variety of devices such as unusual vocabulary, dialect words, etymological derivations and newly coined words. This sense of a "word-craft" and the concern with the living mystery and history of

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[51] Quoted in John Robinson, *In Extremity. A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Cambridge et al. 1978), p. 68; also see *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8/12/1972.
[52] See GMB, *Rockpools and Daffodils*, 22/6/1989.
[53] Quoted in Colin Nicholson, "Unlocking Time's Labyrinth" in C. Nicholson, *Poem, Purpose, Place. Shaping Identity in contemporary Scottish Verse* (Edinburgh 1992), p. 98.
[54] See letter to Robert Bridges, 6/11/ 1887; in Claude Colleer Abbott (ed.), *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges* (London 1935), p. 266.
[55] Ibid., letter to Robert Bridges, 4/1/1883, p. 169.
[56] Quoted in J. R. Watson, *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1987), p. 39.

language became an important part of Brown's aesthetic too. While he was at Newbattle this interest started to take a clearer shape, and when he read English at Edinburgh University (1956-1960) he developed a genuine interest in the history and development of the language, which added a more critical underpinning to his earlier more instinctive attraction to Hopkins and his preoccupation with the origin of words and language. Brown remembers that after getting over initial difficulties he was "quite taken" by Old and Middle English:

> I just had to apply myself, and once I got into the grammar, I think I enjoyed that part of the course better than anything else. It was a wonderful feeling of getting right down into the roots of words and language.[57]

The historical and theoretical underpinning Brown acquired while reading English at Edinburgh University, and the knowledge gained from his own postgraduate research on Hopkins taught him the formal appreciation of his work and his poetic legacy.

Apart from his exacting sense of poetry as word-craft, the rich texture of Brown's language also reflects the influence of Hopkins.[58] To the example of Hopkins Brown may owe his use of ellipsis, his at times a-syntactical formations, his use of unorthodox compounds and kennings, his use of epithets and his occasional neologisms. The tone of poems such as "The Storm" with its consonantal progression, its abundant use of exclamation marks and elliptical sentences, as well as its breathless compressed alliterative style may generally be derived from Old English poetry but there may also be detectable the lesson, or even the spirit of Hopkins if one considers Brown's remark about the poem that "The whole story might be taken to represent the soul's flight from evil into the peace of God."[59]

> What blinding storm there was! How it
> Flashed with a leap and lance of nails,
> Lurching, O suddenly
> Over the lambing hills,
>
> [...] the storm
> Seized us! Plunged and spun!
>
> And flung us, skiff and man (wave-crossed, God-lost)
> On a rasp of rock! ("The Storm", *SP*, pp. 1-2)

Occasionally, lines appear in Brown's poems which might have taken their impetus from Hopkins: "Hoof-fast Njal bore his manseed wombfurled waveward"(*FwP*, p. 4). Hopkins' influence may also be felt in Brown's use of striking imagery and compounds such as "grain-gold sea-silvered hands" (*SP*, p. 116); "star-troubled strangers" (*SP*, p. 124); or "wind-flung flower" (*SP*, p. 115). Brown's use of the word

[57] See Nicholson, *Poem, Purpose, Place*, p. 98.
[58] Or of such poets that were influenced by Hopkins and inspired Brown, such as Dylan Thomas.
[59] See GMB, letter to E. W. Marwick, undated. Most certainly 1947, Kirkwall Archive.

"dappled" is also evocative of Hopkins and his praise of all "dappled things"[60]: "Doves in that dappled countryside" (*SP*, p. 64); "Our dappled cow with large eyes" (*SP*, p. 37); "Men daylaboured, were dappled with lanterns" (*FwP*, p. 3). And it is Hopkins more than any other poet who stands behind Brown's own definition of poetry as heightened speech.[61] In his best known comment on poetic language, Hopkins wrote to Bridges on 14 August, 1879:

> It seems to me that the poetical language of an age shd. [*sic*] be the current language heightened, to any degree heightened and unlike itself, but not (I mean normally: passing freaks and graces are another thing) an obsolete one. This is Shakespeare's and Milton's practice. [62]

By heightening ordinary language Hopkins attempted to make it more intense and experiential without its becoming anachronistic. This justifies almost all the devices that he adopted to make words "tell" and to prevent language from becoming automatic and habitual. His methods of heightening (or what Prague-School theorists called "foregrounding") explain most of his idiosyncratic distortions of syntax, his vivid imagery and his rhythmic experiments. All devices contribute to concentrating and energising the meaning by lessening or simply omitting what did not matter to him. He intended the result to have some of the qualities of drama, "a nameless quality" which he thought was of the first importance both in oratory and drama:

> I sometimes call it *bidding*: I mean the art or virtue of saying everything right to or *at* the hearer, interesting him, holding him in his attitude of correspondent or addressed or at least concerned, making it everywhere an act of intercourse – and of discarding everything that does not bid, not tell.[63]

This "art or virtue of saying everything right", or "of discarding everything that does not bid, not tell", is typical too of Brown's sense of poetic accuracy, simplicity and purpose. In 1954, shortly before the publication of his first collection of poetry, *The Storm*, he told Marwick:

> If I manage to write enough poems for a second book, they will be simple and forthright and such as a crofter or fisherman would read and remember with pleasure. Or rather that is the light towards I'll strive.[64]

Yet, while trying to make his language simple and forthright Brown felt that poetic language differed from the language that people speak in the streets or in the fields. He thought that poets have recourse to a "secret language" and devices whereby ordinary words are transformed and de-familiarised so that fresh meanings are created; thus poetry is a celebration: "celebration[s] of name and word". The

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[60] See GMH, *Poems*, "Pied Beauty", no. 37: "Glory be to God for dappled things" (p. 74).
[61] See interview with David Annwn, "Correspondences", in *Poetry Wales* 27, no. 2, p. 19.
[62] See *Letters of GMH to R. B.*, 14/8/1879, p. 85.
[63] Ibid., 4/11/1882, p. 160.
[64] See letter to E. W. Marwick, 12/1/1954.

difference between the poet's language and ordinary speech lies in its solemn quality, its ritual ordering of word and sound:

> Those essences of language known to the poet alone have great beauty, so that men with ordinary speech are moved often to tears or to joy. All hungerers, whether for food or love or light, find in these arcane orderings of sound a bread that can sometimes satisfy them.[65]

Being aware that poetic language, though different in tone, must not be out of date, obscure or removed from ordinary human experience and life, Brown, like Hopkins, looked in two directions: to ordinary language as it is spoken and to its poetic heightening; to simplicity and purity on the one hand, and celebration and ceremony on the other. This is further clarified by Brown in an interview with David Annwn in 1991, where he gave his view of poetic language, summing up a position that remained at the heart of his aesthetic outlook throughout his career; – a position that is completely in the spirit of Hopkins' definition of poetical language as "current speech heightened":

> I tend to go for "heightened speech" – however the history of verse seems to show that once the heightened speech becomes mannered and ridiculous, it is best for the poets to go into the pubs and smithies and farm-yards and listen to what's said there.[66]

Hopkins' attempts to heighten the current language and to make words "bid" or "tell" involved an interest in the resources of the past and the roots of speech buried in the current language. He was searching for the original power of poetry that he felt had got lost. In doing so he was attentive to a particular rhythm which he thought was a remnant of a rhythmic system that existed sometime in the past: sprung rhythm.[67] This rhythm he found in everyday speech. The examples he gives in the preface to his poems include references to Old English and the rhythm of nursery rhymes and weather saws – examples that were meant to demonstrate the consistent use of sprung rhythm in the language when it is used unselfconsciously. "Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all?" Hopkins asked, echoing a query of Robert Bridges;

> Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining [...] opposite and [...] incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm [...] and naturalness of expression. [68]

Thus, sprung rhythm was associated with the natural rhythm inherent in ordinary English speech; and it is this property of the current language upon which Hopkins claimed to base his poetry and maintain, although many kinds of poetic artifice are

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[65] See GMB, "Poets" in *Andrina and Other Stories* (London 1984), p. 56.
[66] See GMB, interview with David Annwn, in *Poetry Wales* 27, no. 2. (1991), p. 19.
[67] For a detailed analysis of Hopkins' theory and use of sprung rhythm see Walter J. Ong, "Hopkins' Sprung Rhythm and the life of English poetry", in *Immortal Diamond*, pp. 93-174.
[68] See *Letters of GMH to R. B.*, 21/8/1877, p. 46.

used to heighten the language, an illusion of ordinary speech. James Milroy points out that sprung rhythm is the

> key to Hopkins's art, [...]. It forms the link between "current language" and the heightened diction of the poetry. [...]. Thus, while sprung rhythm looks in one direction backwards to the spoken language which is its basis, it also faces in the other direction towards poetic heightening.[69]

This is also true for Brown who understood poetry as speech and enjoyed merging ordinary and colloquial language ("what is said in pubs, smithies or farm-yards by crofters and fishermen") with heightened language. Although he never developed a theory of his prosody or anything comparable to Hopkins' sprung rhythm, he felt that the sense of rhythm was one of the graces that a poet needs in order to achieve "a grave ordering of words" into a pattern.[70]

Hopkins' theory and use of sprung rhythm is also related to his concern with the analogy between linguistic sound and musical sound. He set out to revitalise what he believed to be the natural bond between language or speech and music: the rhythmic and melodic pattern. He believed that language was originally musical and that poetry structured according to musical patterns was somehow in touch with the natural origin of language:

> Poetry was originally meant for either singing or reciting; [...] till it is spoken it is not performed, it does not perform, it is not itself.[71]

Hopkins wrote his poetry primarily to be listened to rather than to be read. Emphasising the sound element of poetry he insisted that a poem must be heard with the ears, not simply read with the eyes. This emphasis on the sound value is evident when he writes in a letter to Bridges: "My verse is less to be read than heard, as I have told you before; it is oratorical, that is the rhythm is so."[72] In his lecture notes he defined poetry thus:

> Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by way of hearing, or speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest.[73]

Brown embraced this attitude and agreed that poetry always ought be read aloud and that it comes alive only when it is performed, as used to be the case with folk songs and ballads that were part of people's lives and working patterns:

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[69] See James Milroy, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1977), pp. 123-125.
[70] See GMB, questionnaire by Kevin Perryman (p. 2), 16/1/1986; in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2845.1.
[71] See John Robinson, *In Extremity*, p. 68. Also, in a passage from another letter to Bridges, Hopkins pushes the origin of music and poetry one step further back when he claims that both originate in the primitive rhythms of dance. See *Letters to R. B.*, pp. 119-120.
[72] See *Letters to R. B.*, 21/8/1877, p. 46.
[73] See GMH, "Poetry and Verse" in Humphrey House (ed.), *The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1937), p. 249.

> I think poetry ought to pass the test of being read aloud. The text is still dead lying on a page.[74]

He further explains that his main fascination with poetry was not based on a preoccupation with techniques, styles or what he calls "the finer points" but on something more musical: "The intoxication is the chant."[75] That Brown found Hopkins appealing from the point of view of the musicality of poetry and language is not surprising. For him, as for Hopkins, an interest in poetic voice was allied to an interest in the musicality of verse. Having a fine ear for the physical properties of words himself, Brown was aware that the practice of free verse in particular can be the most difficult to handle, since "it calls for a highly developed sense of rhythm and of essential form and of the deeper music of words."[76] Thus, to return to the musical roots and sources of poetry, enabling poets to re-invest a worn out language and poetics with the qualities of music and song chimed with Brown's own ideas. He was highly appreciative of Hopkins' attempt to renew and purify the language:

> It was a heroic lonely attempt to put song back into a language grown thin and washed-out. Somewhere literature had left the high road and smithy and market-place for the salon and the university, and grown anaemic.[77]

The importance of "putting song back" into language and poetry and endowing it with musical qualities is an idea that appears frequently in Brown's work. In his short-story "Sealskin" he suggests that there are emotions and levels of experience that span such a wide range of meanings, past and present, that we cannot talk or write about them by using ordinary words. He implies that there is a mystery in music and that it can evoke memories and emotions:

> This is indeed a mystery of art, that a few musical notes, in a certain pattern and tempo, should suggest the fall of a wave on an Atlantic shore; since even in impressionistic music there is no similarity in the sound the piano makes to the actual sound made by salt water spending itself on pebbles, sand, rocks, seaweed. The music nevertheless subtly suggests the phenomenon. And why, more mysteriously still, should the same pattern of notes impress the listener with sorrow, with a grief that belongs to the sea alone.[78]

In "The Eye of the Hurricane" Brown proposes that only music, or a poetry understood as a medium that aspires to a similar condition as music, can create a corresponding intensity of feeling, can evoke mystery or has the same incomprehensible spiritual power. Having this in mind he writes about the phenomenon and the implications of love:

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[74] See GMB, autobiographical essay; MS (Dec.1986 - Jan.1987) in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3115.1.
[75] Ibid., p. 4.
[76] See GMB, note for Chambers' anthology of "The Best of Scottish Poetry", 14/7/1988, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3112.8, "Essays and Reviews".
[77] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 150.
[78] See GMB, "Sealskin", in *Hawkfall and Other Stories* (London 1974), p. 134.

> Love is too deep a subject for prose – only music and poetry can build bridges between the rage of the seed in the furrow, the coupling of beasts, the passion of man and woman, the saint's prayer.[79]

Brown suggests that the ideal goal of a language or poetry that yearns towards the condition of music, is an absolute purity, a condition which is outside all things, the condition of silence. Since poetry is in language, it must temporarily pass into song, strive to reproduce the unity and sonority of music and its effects in the mind, before it returns to silence.[80]

Hopkins' heightening devices and his interest in the musical quality of poetry together with his practice of sprung rhythm enabled him to make his language more immediate and experiential. For him the rules of grammar, syntax, traditional metre or diction were not allowed to stand in the way of the immediacy of expression. Thus, he frequently leapt at his thoughts directly and allowed the form of the expression to be guided by an emotional rather than a logical or intellectual sequence. However, his infatuation with words and his giving them a special mystical and transcendental meaning did not result in his banishing ideas in favour of the sound of words. On the contrary: he hoped to strike a perfect balance between the ideas and their expression, between content and form. To him, a poem was not a mere communication of opinions and ideas, it was in the widest sense a gesture, an expression of attitude and state of mind. The delicate relation between the concreteness of sound and the abstractness of that which it stands for or of what it evokes greatly inspired him. Just as music – whose expression does not refer to anything outside itself – can embody meaning or have reverberations in our mind, words were thought to have the same effect; more clearly, the physical properties of words and the form of a poem were meant to signify and reflect the content. In order

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[79] See GMB, "The Eye of the Hurricane", in *A Time to Keep* (London 1996), p. 180.

[80] T. S. Eliot, whose "Four Quartets" Brown admired so much that he knew them almost by heart, also ponders how to create meaning from the flow of time; in the poem Eliot gives his view of the analogy of music and poetry. Both partake of the eternal, ever-present permanence of silence: "Words move, music moves [...] into silence." ("Burnt Norton" V, *Collected Poems* (London 1963), p. 194). He suggests that like music, poetry moves in time and can be performed only through a given sequence of minutes. Both begin and end in performance; they break out of silence and, when finished, return to silence. He felt that it is the nature of poetry or music to abstract from the flux of time and from silence an intermittent moment of illumination by holding it in a pattern or shape. In this sense, verbal or musical utterances are like poems; or as Brown puts it they are: "swatches cut from here and there in the one weave of time" (GMB's foreword to *Winterfold*, 1976), taken from the "pure ring of silence"("Countryman", *Selected Poems*, p. 142). They are temporary celebrations of the silent mystery and therefore have a quasi-epiphanic and spiritual character. In this sense the nature of poetry reflects the nature of music: it is a temporary illumination of the whole, the unsayable or the mystery that cannot be talked about; thus Brown's definition of poetry as "contemplation of silence"(see interview with D. Annwn, *Poetry Wales* 27, p. 19). Brown concludes: "The next best thing to a perfect poem is silence (But there is no perfect poem)"; See (questionnaire by D. J. Jones, EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 20/29/9;1, 1-9.1979).

to approximate a poem to the condition of music Hopkins attempted to heighten it. This kind of heightening can be observed in passages where he uses a number of techniques, as in "The Wreck of the Deutschland", in which the syntax and the rhythm is broken in order to let the content or impression on the mind be created through the form and the verbal expression. In this way Hopkins suggests great emotional agitation:

> But how shall I ... make me room there:
> Reach me a ... Fancy, come faster –
> Strike you the sight of it? Look at it loom there,
> Thing that she ... There then! the Master,
> Ipse, the only one, Christ, King, Head. ("The Wreck...", poem no. 28, stanza 28)

Language was not meant to be strictly referential, pointing to things outside itself, to ideas or "-isms"; rather, Hopkins sought its potential to be more expressive, experiential and sensual. This impatience with language, the straining after immediacy and directness by the welding of form and content brought Hopkins closer to the concerns of modern poets like Brown. He inspired Brown to try to invest in the word or a poem a mysterious quality which in turn restored to the poet both a visionary and creative task. The poet was no longer a reporter of ideas, but a maker and creator; language ceased to be a means whereby things or ideas were merely communicated. It became an act of discovery. In writing a poem, the poet could create and bring to light something that had lain concealed in language.

The perception of language as a mystery that is revealed in the act of its creation had a significant effect on Brown. Particularly since – from the late 1940s onwards – he was looking for a more coherent aesthetic, including ways to weld form and content. His personal correspondence shows that he was concerned about the lack of a more balanced approach to his art. In 1947, sharing this with E. W. Marwick he wrote: "I begin to fear that my interest in ideas fatally overbalances my interest in language."[81] In 1952, he still felt a tendency to be more interested in ideas, but he had been able to clarify for himself what it was that interested him: "states of mind, inscapes interest me more than people or places."[82] However, he was not yet able to achieve a unity and strike a balance between his predilection for ideas or states of mind and the form these should take. It was much later, after having studied and internalised Hopkins' works that Brown made a range of discoveries about language and poetry that helped him arrive at the realisation of poetic wholeness and unity. In Hopkins, Brown found a poet who demonstrated to him that it was possible to tackle the dilemma between language and ideas. Hopkins' sense of the gap

[81] See GMB, letter to E. W. Marwick, undated, most certainly 1947.
[82] Ibid., 18/7/1952.

between thoughts or ideas and words, as well as his vivid visual sense with his strong response to beauty made him want to use a medium that built on a more forceful logic than traditional syntax or semantics. This showed Brown that language could be put in the service of ideas and one's beliefs without being narrowed by it. Thus, Hopkins' celebration of the potentialities of language was revealing for Brown. His poetic practice, his attitude to language and the musical analogy confirmed to him that words could indeed transcend ordinary reality, create presence and evoke things and states of minds that one cannot normally grasp with conventional, referential language. Having found out what his interests were, Brown became more confident about the subject-matter of his verse. His striving was not so much for new things to express, but for precise and fresh means of expression. He certainly shared Hopkins' feeling that "they always mistake the matter of poetry for poetry"[83] and that

> A kind of touchstone of the highest or most living art is seriousness; not gravity but the being in earnest with your subject-reality. [84]

When asked about his own poetic practice and whether he deliberately included ideas in his poetry, he may well have had Hopkins in mind when responding:

> Poetry can be made out of any foolish notion. [...] The noblest ideas won't yield poetry if there's no poetry in the mind that cherishes them. Some beliefs (e.g. Catholicism) have been great nourishers of the arts. But a Catholic poet would be foolish to say, "Today I will write a Catholic poem." Or a Communist poet. Or a Buddhist poet. Poetry pays no heed to "-isms". It might use them. It is never their servant.[85]

[83] See GMH, *Letters to R. B.*, 2/10/1886, p. 229.
[84] See *Letters to R. B.*, 1/6/1886, p. 225.
[85] See GMB, questionnaire by Kevin Perryman, 16/1/1986, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2845.1.

2.2 The Priest: The "sweet clear spirit"

Hopkins' concern with the sound and the form of language was not based on an interest in poetic and linguistic theory for its own sake. On the contrary, his fascination with language and poetry was, particularly after his theological training at St. Beuno's in Wales (1874) and after his ordination in 1877, deeply connected to his faith and his vocation as priest. John Robinson holds that Hopkins' selective employment of the resources of the English language were in fact used "so as to develop in his verse the rigour which characterised his spiritual life".[86] Indeed, Hopkins felt that poetry ought to serve a religious purpose: to praise God, to invoke as well as evoke and glorify His presence, thereby expressing his conviction of God's natural revelation in the beauty of creation. His poetry became a struggle to articulate what had been grasped without words and yet had to be expressed in words: the presence of God. Thus his interest in words was inspired by his belief that it is in art and poetry that the encounter with the sacred takes place. As a result, poetry came to be the meeting-place between two spheres: Man and God; the secular and the sacred.

Brown had similar ideas about art as a meeting ground for the religious and the secular or indeed about the mutually sustaining relationship between religion and art. He felt that the creative imagination had always been nourished by the religious and that religion in turn received much of its beauty and meaning through art and literature. This belief is expressed in the foreword to *The Storm*, where he proposes that poet and saint fulfil a similar and basically spiritual function: in the wake of the Reformation they revive degraded symbols and re-establish spiritual values; they have to "rebuild with their passion the Knox-ruined nation". He believed that the function of poetry was to give expression to basic questions of human existence and that art and literature receive deeper meaning when seen in terms of fundamental human and spiritual needs. Being in the tradition of such thinkers as S. T. Coleridge – to mention only one of the most ardent and best known nineteenth-century spokesmen who argued for the symbiotic relationship between the poetic and religious imagination – Brown thought that

> it is the continuing function of all the arts to be handmaidens of religion, as they were when St. Magnus Cathedral was built: to praise the mystery of the god-man relationship with beauty and delight. Every serious writer has to take religion into his reckoning, if only to reject it, because literature asks the same questions: Where do we come from? What are we doing in the world? Where are we going? [87]

Ultimately, the role of the poet approaches that of a priest in that he has to care for the spiritual needs of his age. His poetry becomes an offering and a vessel for

[86] See John Robinson, *In Extremity. A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1978), p. 56.
[87] See GMB, essay fragment in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1866/17.

religious and spiritual experience.

At this intersection of art and spirituality Brown found another tradition that suited his needs – a tradition that showed him how to combine his discovery of the potentialities of language with his religious ideas, enabling him to constantly return to the nexus between imagination and belief. That he turned to Hopkins for inspiration is not surprising since the underlying thought-structure of his work is built upon a literary and religious inheritance in which Hopkins looms large: a tradition which W. H. Gardner identified as that of Donne, Herbert and Vaughan,[88] and which has been further defined by Eleanor McNees as a tradition of sacramentalist poetics, a tradition she claims to be central to the history of Anglo-Catholic and Catholic poetry in Britain.[89] This tradition to which Brown turned explores the mutually sustaining relationship between poetry and belief or, as poet David Jones puts it, between art and sacrament.[90] The key to the relationship between poetry and religion, or the poetic and the religious imagination, is to be found in a specific attitude towards language, for which Hopkins' rediscovery of the potential of the word in the light of God's Word is crucial. This relationship is reflected on the level of poet and listener who has to realise the deep structure of a poetry which aims to be incarnational and is meant by the poet-priest as an offering.

Brown's insights into the spiritual power of words began to take shape when he discovered his fascination with language at Edinburgh University. When he studied Old and Middle English he found out something about language that seemed even more important than the linguistic or social and historical aspects:

> What I thought I should find most distasteful in our course, Old English and Middle English, became at last the most satisfying of all. The tracing of familiar words to their source. Why did it strike me as rich and strange that the word "lord" for example, meant "keeper of bread", and "lady", "baker of bread"? It illuminates an entire primeval social system. More important, the original meaning of those words invested the New Testament and the rituals of the Church with simplicity and richness and beauty. [91]

This appealed to Brown whose religious beliefs had been in the process of germination for a long time. The verbal rituals and ceremonies of the Catholic Mass, (which he had begun to attend more regularly while at Dalkeith and Newbattle), the language of the Bible and the writings of John Henry Newman and poets such as

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[88] See W. H. Gardner who holds that Hopkins continues the tradition of Donne, Herbert and Vaughan, arguing that "This metaphysical manner shows itself in unexpected comparisons between the natural object and the artificial, the organic and the mechanical, the ideal and the commonplace" (p. 189).

[89] See Eleanor J. McNees, *Eucharistic Poetry. The Search for Presence in the Writings of John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, and Geoffrey Hill* (London and Toronto 1992).

[90] See David Jones, "Art and Sacrament", in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings*; ed. by Harman Grisewood (London 1959), pp. 143-179.

[91] See GMB, "The Seven Ages of Man", in *The Scotsman*, 30/8/1986.

Hopkins who tried to revivify the original or religious meanings of words and their spiritual reverberations, became even more meaningful for Brown. The beauty and simplicity of the ancient union of language and belief struck him deeply as it imbued poetry and the imagination with something rich and mysterious. His concern with the renewal of language or indeed his reader's sensitivity to language must be seen in conjunction with his religious imagination and his spiritual preoccupations as a Christian. Significantly, in *The Year of the Whale* (1965) he suggests that "dry faith and thin language" are symptoms of the same disease, implying that the decay of language reflects a decay of values and vice versa. He told Marwick about the book:

> Though nothing is said about the twentieth century – or not much – the whole book is an implicit criticism of us and our time – dry faith, thin language, [...]. The main business of any poet is to keep the roots and the sources clean. He starts with language since that's the material he works in – "purify the language of the tribe" – restore images [...] for if the language gets fouled, then all values go – people think wrong, or sloppily, then all proportion and value are lost, life becomes meaningless.[92]

Brown's personal search for meaning was inspired by his religious impulse and energised by the discoveries he made on reading religious and explicitly Catholic literature. Yet, he "lingered for years in this state of acknowledging Catholicism, while doing nothing about it".[93] Between his first realisation that he preferred Catholicism to Presbyterianism, and his reception into the Catholic church in 1961 lie almost 15 years. It was in the late 1940s, a time of increased introspection that Brown first felt strongly attracted to the Catholic church and repelled by the Church of Scotland and Calvinism:

> Some disturbing thoughts visited me last month. I grow more and more sick of the Church of Scotland. By nature I'm interested in religion (if not strictly speaking a religious person) and the pale watery Calvinism of present day Orkney frankly disgusts me. [...] I could live cheerfully in a Catholic country, or in pre-Reformation Orkney if that were possible; The present day organised religious life here is shocking; much worse than atheism. [94]

At the time Brown was familiarising himself with Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* containing a chapter on the dispute between Cardinal Manning and John Henry Newman. Due to his leanings towards Catholicism he became more interested in the leader of the Oxford Movement, John Henry Newman whose *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* had such a profound effect on him that he wrote to Marwick:

> Have you ever read John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*? I've just finished it and, [...] it has shaken me to the core. There is magnificent devastating logic in it.[95]

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[92] See GMB, letter to E. W. Marwick, 1/9/1965.
[93] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 53.
[94] See GMB, letter to E. W. Marwick, undated, most certainly 1947
[95] Ibid., 26/4/1947.

Promptly he felt inspired to read other accounts of conversions to Catholicism as well as medieval religious lyrics, Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, metaphysical poetry and other religious literature. The experience of learning more about such an institution as the Church of Rome and the traditions of Catholicism as well as familiarising himself with a literature and art that had been moulded and sifted in the experience of generations, had an intense effect on Brown's sense of continuity and pattern. To him it seemed "utterly wonderful" that

> such an institution as the Church of Rome – with all its human faults – had lasted for nearly two thousand years, while parties and factions and kingdoms had had their day and withered [...]. Some mysterious power seemed to be preserving it against the assaults and erosions of time.[96]

Elsewhere he explained:

> I was intrigued by the majesty and mystery: the long history of the church from the dark beginning, that incredibly endured through the changing centuries, always adapting itself; enriched by all that poetry and music, art and architecture, could give.[97]

Brown discovered that with centuries of Catholic art and iconography at his disposal he could build on a tradition that the Catholic Church and Catholicism with its art and symbolism represented. Not only was Catholicism with its formally sacramental theory of nature and its organic theory of its own history and of the relation of the universe to God attractive to him, it also had a synthesising effect on his imagination as it blended Muir's Story and Fable into one and made Christ's life, death and resurrection the central part of the underlying Fable. It allowed him to carry the distinction of the Story and the Fable further along towards the Catholic aesthetic tenet of the interlocking of the ordinary and the divine which is best expressed in the dogma of the Incarnation and is re-enacted in the rituals of the Catholic Mass, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist. In this dogma, respecting as it does both the divinity of the Word and the humanity of the flesh, is contained the whole principle of the Christian aesthetic. It is thought to be the fullest revelation of God to man; as such, it is at the centre of Brown's faith, as indeed of the whole Christian firmament of belief and symbolism. One of the implications of this dogma is the idea that the incarnation redeems the flesh and the world. The flesh, the world, and the word are restored to dignity and are made valid again and the drama of existence, however painful, becomes meaningful. Thus the incarnation makes possible or even demands a sacramental vision of reality. For Brown this meant that everything, even a grain of corn had its own intrinsic value and actuality and at the same time participated in larger relationships. The scriptural association between Christ, the

[96] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 51.
[97] See GMB, quoted from Alan Bold, *George Mackay Brown*, p. 11.

"bread of life" and the grain of wheat that falls to the earth moved him profoundly. Indeed, the sacramental aesthetic of the seed in the earth that dies in order to become "the bread of life" – symbolising Christ's redemptive suffering, his death and resurrection – illuminated the whole of life for him:

> Unless the seed dies in the darkness and silence, new life cannot spring from it – the shoot, the ear, the full corn in the ear, and finally the fragmented bread set on the tables of hungry folk. That image seemed to illuminate the whole life for me. It made everything simple and marvellous. It included within itself everything, from the most primitive breaking of the soil to Christ himself with his parables of agriculture and the majestic symbolism of his passion, and death, and resurrection. "I am the bread of life." "This is my body that is broken for you." That image has a universal meaning for me, especially when I can stand among ripening fields all summer.[98]

Such imagery and symbolism with its recognition of "mystery" as immanent in the ordinary everyday made belief plausible, experiential, immediate and invested it with beauty and simplicity. The world thus seen becomes a reflection of eternal truth. God is believed to be alive and immediately accessible to man in the images of nature; everyone who is prepared to look at the world and appreciate the beauty and transcendent significance of the ordinary will find the divine in every ordinary thing. Moreover, the sacramental rites of the Catholic Church, especially the Eucharist, at once express and confirm the major Christological principles: the redemptive significance of the death and resurrection, the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching and in man's hope, the centrality of Jesus Christ to all of salvation history. The anamnesis and ritual repetition of Christ's sacrifice on the altar, the holy Eucharist is a key to Brown's perception of life and his art. In the Mass and the Eucharist Brown sees all time comprised in the sacramental act: "the whole history of man – what is to come as well what has been – is caught up in that brief ceremony at the altar."[99] He believed that the rituals of the Mass as well as other sacraments by way of words and symbols unify time. While revealing a future glory (the kingdom of God) they also evoke the past in an anamnesis and recalling of what Christ did to accomplish man's redemption. Thus, through sacraments like the Eucharist, historic acts of centuries ago are renewed, are made present again and allow man to participate in something timeless. Oppositions that are part of life can be reconciled because of the Incarnation, since Christ is the archetype of all paradox and the supreme symbol of brokenness before wholeness. Because Christ himself has instituted with his crucifixion a pattern of flux and of paradox, brokenness and wholeness and the stress of suffering that precedes eternal life, he fulfilled his

[98] See GMB, "Writer's Shop", in *Chapman* 16 (1976), p. 43.
[99] See GMB, an autobiographical essay, MS, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3155.1

purpose and became his full self in the act of sacrifice. Hopkins felt that nature kept faith with this pattern. As G. Hartman puts it, he saw "the sacrifice of Christ imprinted like a physical law in even the lowliest corner of nature".[100] Thus Hopkins regarded sacrifice as indispensable for a renewal of sacramental presence on earth and for the elevation of sacramental time over chronological time. At the heart of his poetry is the Feast of Corpus Christi, the supreme affirmation of Real Presence:

> Corpus Christi is the feast of Real Presence; therefore it is the most purely joyous of solemnities. Naturally the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession at it. [...] But the procession has more meaning and mystery than this! It represents the process of the Incarnation and the world's redemption. As Christ went forth from the bosom of the Father as the Lamb of God and eucharistic victim to die upon the altar of the Cross for the world's ransom; then rising returned leading the procession of the flock redeemed, so in this ceremony his body in statu victimali is carried to the Altar of Repose [...] and back to the tabernacle at the high altar, which will represent the bosom of the godhead.[101]

Brown also understood the sacrifice of Christ and its ritual repetition in the Mass as *the* central pattern that connects all ages:

> That was the one only central sacrifice of history. I am the bread of life. All previous rituals had been a foreshadowing of this; all subsequent rituals a re-enactment. The fires at the centre of the earth, the sun above, all divine essences and ecstasies, come to this silence at last – a circle of bread and a cup of wine on an altar.[102]

The belief that the Mass is a timeless repetition and anamnesis of Christ's sacrificial death is expressed most clearly by Brown in another passage in *Magnus*:

> The Mass was not an event that takes place in ordinary time [...]; it takes place both in time, wherein time's conditions obtain, and also wholly outside time; or rather, it is time's purest essence, a concentration of the unimaginably complex events of time into the ritual words and movements of a half-hour.[103]

What was appealing to Brown was that the Mass and the Catholic concept of sacrament never lost their localisation in particular elements while still having a transcendent nature. The celebration of the Eucharist for instance is seen to be the supreme example of the meeting of a metaphysical and physical reality expressed by sacramental signs and words; thus, in the eucharistic rite man-made bread and wine symbolically bespeak a hidden grace. That such a double perception of life – something that characterises Christ's parables and the world-view behind biblical literature and poetry in general – touched Brown profoundly is not surprising. Its attraction rests on a major Catholic theological and pastoral doctrine which is in the

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[100] See G. Hartmann, *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke and Valery* (New Haven 1954), p 61.
[101] See GMH, *Letters to R. B.*, p. 149.
[102] See GMB, *Magnus*, p. 158
[103] Ibid., p. 129.

last analysis deeply aesthetical and therefore highly attractive for a poet of Brown's nature: it is its commitment to the sacramental principle and its affirmation of mystery in all reality. Clarifying this Richard McBrien states:

> Catholicism has never hesitated to affirm the "mysterious" dimension of all reality: the cosmos, nature, events, persons, ritual, words. Everything is, in principle, capable of embodying and communicating the divine. Just as the divine reaches us through the finite, so we reach the divine through the finite. The point at which this "divine commerce" occurs is the point of sacramental encounter. For Christians, the point of a sacramental encounter with God is Jesus Christ.[104]

Although sacraments are directly ecclesiological in character, having their immediate context in the church, sacramentalism can be understood in a wider sense if one applies it to any finite reality through which the divine is perceived to be disclosed and communicated, or through which our human response to the divine assumes some measure of shape, form and structure. In this sense one can speak of Hopkins' and Brown's art as sacramental art since it is with words and in their poetry that they respond to the religious and mystical and give shape and expression to their faith. To the extent that Brown's work reflects and explores imaginatively the points of a sacramental encounter with the divine, he can be seen as being part of a tradition of sacramentalist poetics.

Furthermore, because the sacraments allowed Brown to perceive a truth by way of sensory experience, he insisted on a link between experience and truth, an experiential kind of truth that Keats had in mind, something that is not grasped by (or even defies) reasoning, but by perceiving the beauty and design of the creation via the senses. This is explained with more urgency in his autobiography when he concludes:

> The simplest Mass is the most beautiful event imaginable.
>
> The scriptural Passion that was its matrix is beyond the imaginative reach of Dante, Shakespeare, Tolstoy. We ought to know, instinctively, that it *must* have happened that way: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know...'"[105]

Brown's perception of truth as a sensory experience and something that is felt in the heart implies that beauty and truth are the same; they may differ in degree but basically they are different conditions of the same thing. Whereas truth is immortal and with God, beauty and our perception of it are mortal.

At times Hopkins experienced this sensualism, which was part of his inborn creative personality as poet and artist, and his asceticism, which was the acquired religious attitude of the Jesuit priest, as a disturbing tension. However, Catholic sacramentalism allowed him to maintain a balance between these two opposing

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[104] See Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (London 1970), p. 731.
[105] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 185.

forces. Exploring the questions of the value and the moral dangers of physical beauty he attempted to place it in perspective:

> To what serves mortal beauty – dangerous; [...]
> [...] See: it does this: keeps warm
> Men's wits to the things that are; what good means. ("To what serves mortal beauty", poem no. 38)

The benefit of physical or mortal beauty is, according to Hopkins that, like all man's attributes, it reflects his soul. As a gift from heaven beauty can tell us what good means and it indicates what being, reality, and truth is: "the things that are", things that are present to the human senses, here and now. As indicated earlier, Brown too steps from the experience of physical beauty and its effects on the imagination towards a truth. His spiritual search for meaning and wholeness was closely bound up with his fascination with the more sensuous aspects of words, the creative imagination and his sense of beauty. Consequently, physical beauty and the physical shape of words in a poem or the beauty of a piece of art cannot be separated from some deeper truth that it reflects. That his work is marked by the belief in a link between physical beauty and the beauty of pattern and design as well as its inward grace or truth, is suggested by the poet Ian Hamilton Finlay who identified Brown's striving towards beauty by means of "absolute precision, luminosity and shape" as "the form in art of the Christian moral good".[106]

The close connection of art and Christianity, beauty and truth not only spoke to Brown's creative imagination but also influenced his religious beliefs. It was by way of the beauty of symbols, images and words that he came to knowledge of God and the Christian truth. The symbiotic nature between art and belief as realised and practised by the Catholic Church, had such a strong impact on Brown that his final conversion in 1961 was triggered by the felt power and beauty of words:

> In the end it was literature that broke down my last defences. There are many ways of entering a fold; it was the beauty of words that opened the door to me [...] The beauty of Christ's parables were irresistible. [*sic*] How could they fail to be, when so many of them concern ploughing and seedtime and harvest, and his listeners were most of them fishermen.[107]

Recalling the experience of reading religious poetry and the circumstances that led to his conversion, Brown concludes that it was not the "way of argument and reason" that challenged his spiritual position; it was the effect that the intensity and the beauty of words had on his religious imagination and his sense of truth that made him enter the Catholic church:

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[106] See letter of I. H. Finlay, 23/8/1956, in The National Library of Scotland, Acc 4847/1.

[107] See GMB, "The way of literature. An Apologia by George Mackay Brown", in *The Tablet*, 12/6/1982, p. 585.

> If "beauty is truth, truth is beauty", here were beauty and truth beyond price. A few fragments of such truth and beauty, like treasures long lost, were sufficient; the way of argument and reason were not for me. [*sic*][108]

Thus, Catholicism with its sacramentalism and symbolism had a significant effect on Brown's aesthetic and religious sense. This even more so since the Catholic Church, instead of offering a formal body of knowledge, believed that knowledge is inseparable from the "knower", from his experience, his imagination and his way of knowing. The sacraments are not treated as abstract religious or philosophical doctrines but are reflected and given meaning in the actual world, addressing people's sense-experience; thus they make God's presence easier to apprehend, more meaningful and plausible. Brown appreciated that

> The sacrament deals with the actual sensuous world – it uses earth, air, water, fire for its celebrations and it invests the creatures who move about among these elements with an incalculable worth and dignity.[109]

Like Hopkins Brown was drawn to Catholic sacramentalism because, unlike the sacramental doctrines and practises of the Reformed Church, it is based on the idea of never losing sight of the classical bedrock of common humanity: ordinary men and women. The mass with its celebration of the Eucharist is firmly localised in the particular and everyday and corresponds with Hopkins' wish to restore nineteenth-century man into the Christian ethos which had been threatened by scientific rationalism and materialism. The enthusiasm about the Incarnation and the belief in the natural revelation of God in visible creation (the Word made flesh) permeates Hopkins' poetry. In "Ribblesdale", he asks: "And what is Earth's eye tongue, or heart else where/ Else, but in dear and dogged man?" His diaries and letters too prove that he saw all things, as well as natural and physical beauty transfused with a new significance and dignity because of the Incarnation. In 1866, in a letter to E. H. Coleridge he stated:

> I think that the trivialness of life is, and personally to each one, ought to be done away with by the Incarnation. [...] It seems therefore that if the Incarnation cd. versari inter [take place among] trivial men and trivial things it is not surprising that our reception or non-reception of its benefits shd. be also amidst trivialities.[110]

For Hopkins, the Incarnation informed any particular object with transcendent significance; and any particular could serve as a poetic image because it revealed through its sacramental nature the reality of Christ. In this way, each poetic image was located in, or "rhymed with" Christ. Hence his concern for ordinary people and

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[108] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 55.
[109] See GMB, *Magnus*, p. 130.
[110] See GMH, letter to E. H. Coleridge, 22/1/1866, in Claude Colleer Abbott (ed.), *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1956), pp. 19-20.

events. He used trivial and ordinary incidents of life as the raw material for his poetry because every ordinary human being is what Christ was: God's word made flesh. Remembering the promise of the Resurrection and immortal life Hopkins dismisses any doubts when he concludes:

> In a flash, at a trumpet, crash,
> I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
> This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
> diamond,
> Is immortal diamond. ("That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire", poem no. 72)

The celebration of the Incarnation and the promise of the resurrection lies at the heart of Brown's vision too. Christian symbolism and sacramentalism inspired his poetic imagination in a way that he discovered worlds beyond worlds without having to travel far afield. He admired the deep faith from which Hopkins constantly drew his powers of spiritual recovery even in times of uncertainty and doubt. Hopkins taught him that

> poetry is for gladness, dewfall and childhood, "innocent Maytime in girl and boy", it celebrates the every-springing freshness of nature.[111]

He confirmed that, because of God's glory in the world, it is the poet's task and the purpose of art to celebrate and praise the mystery that is man – "immortal diamond". Brown was aware that Hopkins inspired his own perception of life and human nature significantly, and he admits to having learned from Hopkins:

> I have learned that [...] the life of everyone is unique and mysterious. Under all the accumulations of custom, boredom and drift lies somewhere "the immortal diamond" spoken of by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Edwin Muir would have called it the "Eden".[112]

This certainly explains much of Brown's choice of themes and characters as well as his conscious attempt to depict ordinary people or to refer to a particular place (such as Orkney) as a microcosm. [113]

The framework of Catholic art and sacramentalism as well as Hopkins' work taught Brown that poetry must not be removed from ordinary human experience if it wants to bring the whole soul into activity. Hopkins wrote about "Tom's Garland: upon the unemployed"; about Felix Randal, a blacksmith from his parish who died from tuberculosis; or about Harry Ploughman in whose work he perceived heroism. Brown also wrote of what he knew well, depicting the life and the places he was familiar with. Interested in ordinary human beings and states of mind, he wrote about

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[111] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 26.
[112] Ibid., p. 26
[113] Moreover, while celebrating the "immortal diamond", Brown shares Hopkins' love of innocence and childhood. As in the visionary poetry of Vaughan, Hopkins and Muir, Brown's moments of clearest insight are often closely allied with his delight in the simplicity and innocence of childhood.

individual people: farmers, ploughmen, fishermen, tramps, children and ordinary countrymen. His perception of ordinary people and events as partaking in much wider relationships is demonstrated in his poem "Gregory Hero" where the death of a simple fisherman is treated like the death of a hero, or in his evocations of the birth of Christ when he writes of the birth of a child. Like Hopkins Brown thought that "sacramentally seen, the poorest beggar is a prince, every peasant is a lord, and the croft wife at her turning wheels of stone and wood is 'a lady gaye'."[114] Moreover, because for Brown, the processes of agriculture had an intrinsically Christian message, the figure of the peasant is linked to the spiritual value of agriculture. Like Hopkins Brown regarded the figure of the peasant or ploughman as being at the heart of civilisation; agriculture is an altogether epiphanic experience and a life-giving symbol. In "John Barleycorn" he suggests a parallel between the natural life-cycle of corn and the life of Christ and in "Stations of the Cross", Christ's passion is re-enacted in the daily toil of the crofter. In *A Portrait of Orkney* he declares that "behind symphonies, great art and literature, [...] is the cornstalk"– symbol of both physical and spiritual nourishment.[115]

Besides Catholicism (which certainly explains some of Hopkins' interest in presenting poems as celebrations of particular and often ordinary people, places or objects), other more philosophical insights also influenced his habit of perception and his theory of knowledge. Hopkins thought that those who want to find God (and his manifestation in each mortal thing) must be willing to believe and be ready to look at the world in a certain way. To him knowledge of God's creation was at the root of real religious knowledge since the beginning of true religion cannot lie in a book, nor in science. He wanted to activate two things in himself as well as in his readers: the looking inward into one's own soul to find God, and the looking outward at God's creation and the natural world.

[114] See GMB, *Magnus*, p.130.
[115] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 87.

2.2.1 It is the seeing that matters: Hopkins' theology of the particular

Brown's vision took some of its energy from Hopkins' habit of perception which includes a sustained double vision, or what Margaret Ellsberg called a "theology of the particular".[116] In this context scholars commonly agree that the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus and his theory of knowledge and individuation influenced Hopkins' understanding of the relation between the particular and the universal and informed his technique of the gradual ordering of minute details. Duns Scotus held that it is through the knowledge of the singular that the mind, by abstracting and comparing in a second act, arrives eventually at its knowledge of the universal. That means that the mind can know the universal through apprehending an individual object's "thisness" ("haecceitas") and that such apprehensions ultimately reveal God. Since one knows a thing not by its essence, but by the way it is perceived, the processes of perception and seeing are crucial. Although this is necessarily a simplification one can see why the emphasis on the value of the concrete thing, the object of sense, appealed to Hopkins. Put into the framework of his Catholicism and sacramentalism, it was a philosophical corroboration of his religious beliefs according to which the relationship of the particular to the universal was direct because of the Eucharist, in which both inhered at once, and because of the Incarnation, its original type. More specifically, the doctrine of Real Presence and transubstantiation as a repetition of the Incarnation implied that a natural particular can both contain the obvious material accidents of one thing (man-made bread) and the substance of another (Christ's body). The understanding of the incarnation could thus inform a particular object with transcendent significance. Hopkins' belief in poetry as a meeting ground for the earthly and the divine, or the real and the mystical thus received meaning from both the sacramental aesthetic of the Catholic Church and medieval philosophy. Within this theological and indeed philosophical and aesthetic framework knowledge and truth were approached by the extension of a single sovereign principle: the principle of rhyme.[117] Hopkins held that all words and objects that exist rhyme and chime and share something because they all derive from the same universal original Logos. He believed that looking at things can reveal something about their source and creator, elevating the act of seeing to a form of prayer and praise and making the wish to grasp the infinite in the finite, the divine in the earthly the ground for a mystical experience. However, since in nature Hopkins was confronted at the beginning with a world of unrelated particulars he had to begin

[116] See M. Ellsberg, *Created to Praise* (Oxford 1987), p. 72.
[117] See J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God. Five Nineteenth-century writers* (London et al. 1975), p. 277.

with individuals and not with universals. This habit of microscopic vision is characteristic of his analytical mind and exists in tense opposition to his desire to have a vision of the whole. While searching for the universal he attached great importance to the particular and to each individual thing as a reflection of Christ. For him, it was precisely the distinctive and contrasting features of individual beautiful things that God and His design were most clearly "wafted". He believed in the communicability of God through the particular and individual patterns of things that were expressive of their inward form or hidden grace ("thisness" or Duns Scotus' "haecceitas"). Hence he was especially drawn to everything distinctive, varied, uniquely patterned, or rife with contrast: "dappled" things, "couple-colour", "fickle", "freckled":

> Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
> With swift, slow, sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
> He fathers forth whose beauty is past change:
> Praise Him. ("Pied Beauty", poem no. 37)

The idea that God created the whole world so that each part of it would give him glory by revealing the special individuality that he had given it, is more clearly expressed in the octet "As Kingfishers Catch Fire":

> As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
> As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
> Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
> Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves – goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
> Crying What I do is me: for that I came.
>
> I say more: the just man justices;
> Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
> Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is –
> Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces. ("As Kingfishers Catch Fire", poem no. 34.)

By being itself, each individual thing in creation "selves": it reveals itself to man as fully as it can, reveals to him part of God's beauty. If man wants to catch the full natural revelation of God he must learn to be sensitive to the particular individualised aspects of "each mortal thing". If he wants to "keep grace" and maintain the capacity to believe in God, he has to emulate Christ's pure behaviour and "Act[s] in God's eye what in God's eye he is – / Christ", revealing that part of God that has been made flesh.[118]

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[118] Underlying and informing this poem is the parallelism that Hopkins sees as inherent in nature itself: the parallelism of the Elijah story. Nature and God are both separate and intimately connected; they might meet eventually but we can imagine it only by way of comparison, contrast and analogy.

The piercing down to the essence of objects, people, or states of mind, in short, this microscopic vision allied to a double vision that invests the discovered particular thing with a wider significance, allows the poet to work on two levels, the sacred and the secular, elevating things and ideas from a profane context into sacramental matter. Due to their double vision, Hopkins and Brown felt that everything was capable of suggesting a mysterious dimension and could be imbued with the hidden presence of God while at the same time it expresses or acts out its inner nature. The sacramentalism of the Catholic aesthetic thus allowed Brown to put his existing "double vision" and his perception of two interacting worlds in the context of Hopkins' theology of the particular and his Catholicism. It enabled him to see life from differing foci; – a quality that Ellsberg, commenting on Hopkins, described as an ability to grasp reality "with a mind and an eye at once medieval and modern".[119]

[119] See M. Ellsberg, *Created to Praise*, p. 77.

2.2.1.2 John Henry Newman's philosophy of perception

The ultimate object of Hopkins' poetry and his belief in the particular as showing forth the universal is not the thing seen but the seeing. In accord with the Jesuit belief in meditation and the impression on the imagination, the heart and the senses as methods for best arousing the Christian to action, but also profoundly influenced by the teachings of John Henry Newman, Hopkins held that real faith requires trust in the senses. Therefore he constantly invited his audience to look at and apprehend particular things before trying to comprehend abstract notions. In "Hurrahing in Harvest" he presents his own experience of how God's presence can be detected by looking at and opening one's heart and soul to nature and the landscape:

> I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes,
> Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour:
> And, eyes, heart, what looks, what lips yet gave you a
> Rapturous love's greeting of realer, of rounder replies? ("Hurrahing in Harvest", poem no. 15)

Also in "Harry Ploughman" he describes a ploughman in action, encouraging readers to look afresh at an ordinary farmer and to see what he sees in him:

> He leans to it, Harry bends, look. Back, elbow, and liquid waist [...]/
> See his wind-lilylocks-laced;
> Churlsgrace, too, child of Amansstrength, how it hangs or hurls
> Them – [...]
> With-a-fountain's shining-shot furls. ("Harry Ploughman", poem no. 48)

Or in "The Starlight Night":

> Look at the stars! Look, look up at the skies!
> O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air! [...]
> Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!
> Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows! ("The Starlight Night", poem no. 9)

The influence exercised by Newman's philosophy of perception and his belief in the universality and dependence on the senses as a basic requirement for faith and real assent rather than notional assent (which is assent by means of logical constructs and abstractions or strict proofs) was profound for Hopkins, whose conversion to Catholicism was strongly influenced by Newman. For Brown this influence was also deep and vibrant as he himself suggests:

> The phrase in some book that finally, for Newman, led from Anglicanism to Catholicism [...] made me catch my breath [...] It was the same kind of astonishment as Newman had felt; though much diluted of course.[120]

Newman's teachings appealed to Hopkins and Brown for a number of reasons. Firstly, as Stephen Prickett points out, by defining the life of the church as poetic and by understanding religion by analogy with poetry, "Newman's was the most subtle,

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[120] Ibid., p. 51.

the most satisfying, and the most comprehensible solution to the problem of the relationship of the religious to the poetic that the nineteenth century was to see."[121] For Newman the establishment of truth was not grounded on dogmatic ruling and passive acceptance but on an active assent which engages the imagination. His main contention or "grammatical principle", as described in his *Grammar of Assent* was that religious belief originates in the imagination, and that its verification depends, now as in the past, upon its first being made credible to the imagination. This was grounded on an association of imagination and belief: what begins as an impression on the imagination or on the senses may later become a system of belief. Thus, for Newman, the church lived not through its theology, through articles or doctrines, but in its symbols and sacraments, its stories, myths and rituals, – forms that he thought had always engaged the creative imagination and the religious life of a community. This is why the church appeals to the heart, the sense of beauty and the imagination first, before it engages the reason.[122] Further, Newman argued that in the first place faith requires apprehension, not necessarily understanding, in short, some mental image capable of moving the will to desire or repulsion. Notions or abstractions are unreal and incapable of moving the will; they must be joined to something from the experience of the person in order to provoke real assent: "Real apprehension [...] is an experience or information about the concrete."[123] In this way, God was accessible to and faith was apprehensible by even the most ignorant or uneducated.[124]

Brown welcomed Newman's ideas and his belief that faith ought to be plausible and accessible to everybody. This is reflected in his work where those characters who are cast out of respectable society often have the deepest insights into the religious and spiritual. In "Celia", a woman accused of alcoholism and prostitution finds her own ways of approaching God, though different from those of the established church or of regular church-goers. Frequently Brown depicts children as the ones who see the beauty of the creation more easily. In his poem "Island School", a boy's way to school is elevated (or indeed sacramentalised) when his

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[121] See S. Prickett, *Words and the Word. Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge 1986), p. 68.

[122] Newman's distrust of formal syllogistic logic turned him more and more towards an interest in the primary forms of the imagination such as analogy, metaphor and symbol as the appropriate vehicles of the living ideas of a community. In this sense, the life of the church was poetic and "The church herself [is] the most sacred and august of poets." See J. H. Newman, *Essays Critical and Historical*, two volumes (1871), vol. II (London 1890), p. 442, quoted in Prickett, p. 67.

[123] See Newman, *An Essay in aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), ed. by C. F. Harrold (London 1957), p. 38.

[124] Explaining to his father why he was so attracted by Catholicism Hopkins draws on Newman: "God must have made the Church so as to attract and convince the poor and unlearned as well as the learned." See GMH, letter to his father, in *Further Letters*, 16/10/1866, p. 93.

experience is described as the subtle celebration of his natural surroundings and his community. The sounds of the sea are described as "choirs of the sea", evoking solemn praise reminiscent of the Mass.[125] In *An Orkney Tapestry* too, Brown describes how the Vikings saw the "Via Cruxis" in terms of a ship. They understand Christ as the hero, the captain of the ship, putting transcendental and divine truths and beliefs into the context of their own elementary experience and their immediate background.[126] Moreover, Brown appreciated Newman's attempt to show that Catholicism makes it possible to believe things that one does not understand. In *Magnus* he explains that after the "fall" there is no way of knowing or wholly understanding things; rather, one has to acknowledge mystery as part of life and be content with

> things that cannot be properly understood but only wondered at and celebrated (being too subtle for understanding).[127]

Newman's and Hopkins' belief that the religious imagination has "a living hold on truths which are really to be found in the world" also appears to have been completely in Brown's spirit.[128] After all it was his own experience that Christ's parables and the image of the seed that falls to the earth, dies and brings forth new life, could stir the imagination and the heart deeply and make faith plausible and easier to grasp. Thus, Brown hoped to invite a response in the imagination and to animate his audience to participate in discovering and rediscovering primary forms of (religious) faith as expressed in forms that have always nourished the imagination: symbols, stories, myths and (verbal) rituals. Rather than dissect, explain and try to understand or adhere to a strict doctrinal faith, as it was encouraged after the Reformation, Brown asks his readers to respond imaginatively to the world and to sense-experience, rather than intellectually. He rejected a bookish Sunday-faith in favour of a more natural and immediate perception of God in the everyday, thereby exploring and celebrating more fundamental forms of belief and worship that existed long before articles or formulated creeds. Deploring that after the Reformation religious worship and the perception of the divine in "each mortal thing" became severed from personal experience and everyday life, Brown states:

> The fissure reaches far back through many generations to the Reformation. It was then that the old heraldry began to crack, that the idea of "progress" took root in men's minds. What was broken, irremediably, in the sixteenth century was the fullness of life of a community, its single interwoven identity. In earlier times the temporal and the eternal, the story and the fable, were not divorced, as they came to be after Knox: they used the same language and imagery, so that

[125] See GMB, *The Wreck of the Archangel*, pp. 9-10.
[126] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 118.
[127] See GMB, *Magnus*, p. 129.
[128] See J. H. Newman, *An Essay in aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), p. 106.

> the whole of life was illuminated. Crofters and fishermen knew what Christ was talking about, better perhaps than the canons and prebendaries of St Magnus, because they bore the stigmata of labour on their bodies – the net let down into the sea, the sower going forth to sow, the fields white towards harvest. The miracle of the five loaves and two fishes must have been intensely meaningful to a people who, in spite of perennial poverty and occasional famine, saw the bannock and the salt on their winter table. Most marvellous of all was that their daily labours were a divine image for their strivings heavenwards, and were rewarded at last by the Bread of Heaven, the Blessed Sacrament, Christ himself dwelling in them. Here was the ultimate intermingling of the earthy and the holy. They saw it as the superlative wit and charity of Heaven. They were sustained by an immense confidence and security. Ultimately all was well with them. They knew that an angel and a devil wrestled inside each of them for possession of their soul, and the outcome was uncertain until the moment of death. But the sacraments of the Church, particularly penance and the Eucharist, were an infallible remedy.[129]

In *Pictures in the Cave* too Brown deals with the loss of theological and philosophical roots that were part of a Pre-Reformation sensibility and the organisation of a corporate religious life. His rejection of Calvinism and the Reformed Church is informed by Newman's teachings and by what was mediated by Hopkins' writing. By juxtaposing the "outsider"-figure in *Pictures in the Cave* with the respectable church-going community, Brown lays bare the Newmanesque distinction between real assent (that takes place in "greenfield's kirk" and is accessible to everyone) and notional assent, typical of Calvinist worship in a Church for the elect, conferring sacramental grace only to those faithful who are present in the communion:

> Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon when they were all trooping kirkwards, there was the powerful morose creature leaning on the kirkyard wall smoking a pipe. "Have you nothing better to do," he would shout, "than sit on a fine day listening to that old drone with his fire and brimstone? Look at the free clouds up there. Look at the sun and the huge blue sea. They're God's handiworks, and He wants us to enjoy them. That's what I'm going to do anyway – I'll worship out here in 'greenfields kirk'."[130]

This explains why Brown's perception and celebration of cornstalk, loaves, fishes and daffodils as representatives of the ongoing death and renewal of life in nature and as symbols of Christ's passion, are not to be confused with a pantheistic nature-worship but are to be seen as part of his worship in "greenfields kirk". Neither is his way of perceiving and glorifying the world an easy blend of aestheticism with Christian doctrine. Rather, influenced by Newman and Hopkins, Brown explored more rudimentary and primary forms of faith and worship characteristic of a time when man still thought of himself as part of an organic unity of nature, God and the world. Frequently his attempts to evoke a sensibility or consciousness close to that of the early Christians and their grasp of existence, involve apparently unorthodox

[129] See GMB, "The Broken Heraldry", in Karl Miller, *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland* (London 1970), p. 145.
[130] See GMB, *Pictures in the Cave* (Edinburgh 1990), p. 60.

elements or patterns of belief and worship, as is the case when he depicts northern or pagan versions of the Christian sacrifice and when he welds pagan traditions with his unique picture of Christianity.

However, by imaginatively taking the journey back to pre-Christian, medieval and pre-Reformation times, Brown hoped to re-sensitise and re-familiarise his audience with a sensibility that Eliot described as dissociated in the aftermath of the Reformation. In an age when, as Brown thought, religion was out of fashion, he hoped to revitalise alternative approaches to the mystery of existence and the mystery of the God-man relationship. Attempting to "keep the sources pure", Brown raised fundamental questions in new form since Newman and Hopkins as well as his own experience had confirmed to him that a belief or religion that is not socially plausible and actively incorporated into life soon moves to the margins and is drained of its life-sustaining powers.

2.2.2 The perception of Inscapes or art as "pattern-seeking":

All the world is full of inscapes (GMH) [131]

Hopkins' habit of perception, and his belief in the unique selfhood of each thing as a reflection of God, transformed his encounter with the world and with Being (the Parmenidean "It is") into a mystical experience. By looking at the world, he felt that each thing that *is* has uncounted possible realities. Inspired by one of the most fundamental philosophical and ontological questions: What is meant by saying that a thing *is*, and that it is *as* it is?[132], and drawing on the theology of Dun's Scotus, he went on to identify the two related qualities of Inscape and Instress. From 1868 onwards he used the concept of Inscape to refer to all the multiple aspects of a thing as they are held in a pattern and design. Apart from meaning pattern or design, Inscape indicates the essence or substance or individual quality of something; that which gives it its own special and particular identity. Its specific design is the visible sign of its hidden essence. However, Hopkins felt it was not enough to say that something *is*. He believed that the distinctive design and identity of a thing is not static but dynamic since each being in the universe "selves", that is, it enacts its identity. Thus, he thought that one recognises the Inscape of other things and beings in an act of what he called Instress. Instress is the energy which produces and maintains the distinctive visible pattern. By an intense thrust of energy toward an object one may realise its specific distinctiveness. One has to instress it in order to carry over some force deep within the object which impresses one's mind before one can know it. He held that the known shape of something and its felt life are linked together to a common In-being or idea.[133] The perception of Inscapes he considered to be the very soul of art. Moreover, because he saw a relationship between the Inscapes perceived in nature and Inscapes that could be created in language, he also believed in the possibility of a deeper link between reality and language. Therefore he selected his words carefully to hold fast in shaped sound an inner life. Trying to catch the ever

[131] See GMH, *Journals and Papers*, p. 230.

[132] The Greek philosopher Parmenides defined it as follows: "Being is and Not-being is not".

[133] By contemplating simple things and objects Hopkins came to believe that the hidden energy (Instress) moulding them into shapes, patterns and colours (Inscapes) was the very energy of God himself. The Inscape of a thing, its outward shape and beauty was to him the reflection of the invisible beauty of God, whose central instress is mystery and holiness. The entry in his Journal on 18 May, 1870 shows how much he enjoyed the beautiful Inscapes of the created world as part of his sacramental vision and as evidence of the presence of God in the world. One day, when the bluebells were in bloom he wrote: "I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it. It[s inscape] is [mixed of] strength and grace." See *Journals and Papers*, p. 199.

new immediacy of sensation created by words he attempted to name the *It is*, the essence and Inscape of things:

> "drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple/Bloom." ("May Magnificat")
> "Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivelled snow" ("The Wreck of the Deutschland",)
> "wimpled-water-dimpled, not-by-morning-matched face" ("The Leaden and the Golden Echo")
> "dapple-dawn-drawn falcon" ("The Windhover")
> "The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden-furled/ Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame," ("The Wreck")

Hopkins insisted that art is not mimesis, a reproduction of external reality. For him it was bound up with the perception and creative transformation of the shape and pattern of something as well as with the force of stress that comes from within something and can be felt. In a letter to Robert Bridges he sums up how important the idea of Inscape was to him and his art:

> design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling "inscape" is what I above all things aim at in poetry.[134]

Both the processes of perception as well as those of representation are central to the concept of Inscape. In Hopkins' view, artists in particular have to be sensitive to the Inscapes in nature and ought to attempt to create Inscapes in their own art. In the act of instressing and inscaping they become a celebrant of the divine, at once recognising God's creation and enacting their own God-given identity within it. For Hopkins, poetry enacts this celebration.

Brown, who made "Inscape in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins" the subject of his post-graduate research, was certainly familiar with Hopkins' rather flexible and diverse definitions of the term. However, given Brown's natural predilection for what he called "pattern-seeking", it is safe to assume that one of the meanings of Inscape that struck him most deeply was that of "design" and "pattern". He too found the detection and celebration of Inscapes and patterns very appealing. In nature, the natural cycles and the immediate surroundings he found constant nourishment for his imagination and his sense of beauty. His work thrives on the patterns and shapes that he saw and the design that he recognised in the people who have been part of Orkney's history: fishermen and farmers. He was receptive to the beauty of "summer light and winter darkness" and he attempted to reconcile their perceived opposition by an act of instress, which helped him to appreciate and celebrate nature's design:

> The seasons are not opposites but complementary. It is in winter barns and cupboards that the riches of summer are stored. Into the dark solstice comes the light of the world. We know that

[134] See GMH, *Letters to R. B.*, p. 66.

> our candles and fires are one with the corn-ripening sun. From the wheel of the year came, wavering and lovely, the dances of Johnsmas in summer and the boisterous Yuletide reels.[135]

The detection of patterns in nature and the natural world could even evoke a spiritual or mystical experience. Recalling an experience he had when climbing up Brinkie's Brae where he was watching the flight of a kestrel, Brown remarked that "from the point of view of worship, it was almost as good as having been in church".[136]

Brown was sensitive to "constants in human nature, and constants in the human situation". He believed with Hopkins that it is the purpose of art, poetry and music to thrive on them: "They gather into themselves a huge scattered diversity of experience and reduce them to patterns."[137] He felt the need to find and trace patterns in life, nature and human behaviour; this kind of "pattern-seeking" is basic to his art, which builds on an "aroma", "flavour", "rhythm" or a suggestion as instressing elements, rather than on mimesis. In such an inscaped universe, everything has a purpose and a hidden pattern which shapes and gives meaning to life and to the rituals in which people celebrate it. Life and historical patterns too, as they are repeated throughout time, are Inscapes whose true perception and recognition eventually allows the creation of meaning. The artist's task is to detect and reveal these patterns, instress them and offer them to his audience. That the perception and the laying bare of Inscapes and patterns is crucial to the process of unravelling truth and meaning is suggested by Brown when he comments on *Magnus*:

> As I was thinking about ways to tell the story of the actual martyrdom in Egilsay in 1117, it occurred to me that the whole story would strike a modern reader as remote and unconnected with our situation in the twentieth century. The truth must be that such incidents are not isolated casual happenings in time, but are repetitions of some archetypal pattern; an image or an event stamped on the spirit of man at the very beginning of man's time on earth, that will go on repeating itself over and over in every life without exception until history at last yields a meaning.[138]

Possibly, Brown hoped to find confirmed in Hopkins what he learned from Muir about art and the representation of reality, namely that the poetic imagination has its own truth. Moreover, because he felt that "the sense of beauty and fittingness seems to have atrophied in the human spirit since that blind quest for progress and profit was embarked on", he regarded it as his task to restore, re-familiarise and remind people of life-giving patterns. In order to do so he needed to instress, stress the patterns, the "life-giving archetypes" and symbols so that his readers would see, feel

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[135] See GMB, essay fragment, MS (6/12/1988), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3115.3.
[136] See GMB, "From Brinkie's Brae", in A. Bevan and B. Murray (eds.) *Northern Lights. A Poet's Sources* (London 1999), pp. 103-104.
[137] Ibid., p. 129.
[138] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 178-179.

and experience the force behind them. It is in this sense that one has to understand Brown's claim that his poetry is a "memory and a celebration" of Inscapes and patterns, and that his task as a poet and story-teller is "to order his words into the same kind of celebration".[139] The act of making and thereby celebrating his divine gift, brings man close to God. Creating Inscapes becomes an act of thanksgiving, an offering to God. In "The Eye of the Hurricane" Brown suggests that man's task is to imitate God in his creativeness. Barclay destroys a whole morning's work because: "the words I offered to the Word were added insults, a few more random thorns for the crown."[140]

However, the ultimate dilemma was how to inscape and instress words and offer them as a contribution to the Original Word? What kind of language was to be used to instress the divine force and patterning and act out a celebration by creating a distinctive beauty and style in art? Both poets identified these problems and approached them in their own way. As poets they had to start with the word; – the word invested with Inscape and pattern. Further elucidating this Brown points out that: "Without rhythm and pattern, nothing can be well made. Art – and by implication history and life – has, lacking them, no real meaning."[141]

[139] See GMB, essay fragment, MS (6/12/1988), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3115.3
[140] See GMB, "The Eye of the Hurricane", in *A Time to Keep*, p. 163.
[141] See GMB, "The Art of narrative", MS (14/1/1988), in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3112.8.

3. The Making of Inscapes or how to "give God being".

3.1 Returning the Word to God

A religious poet possesses no privileged language; he must himself find a way to make the divine manifest itself, he must find a poetic language that can participate in the divine. Commenting on this problem E. J. McNees states:

> How to speak of the divine in a commonly available language is a central problem for the religious poet. He must find a means to bridge the linguistic gap between the ordinary word and its extraordinary implications. Lacking a shared tradition of sacredness, he cannot adopt the role of the shaman and make his readers automatic participants in a divine order. He must discover a poetic method that will confirm and render meaningful the central religious experience he wishes to convey. [...] Because, unlike [...] Adam or the Apostles after Pentecost, the religious poet possesses no privileged language, he must manipulate the given one to make the divine manifest itself. By dislodging theological words from their scriptural and liturgical contexts, he substitutes a poem for a religious sacrament;[142]

If, as McNees claims, a poem can be offered as a sacrament, or indeed if art is to be identified with sacrament,[143] then the religious poet is akin to a priest who performs an act of anamnesis when recalling Christ's words and actions in the eucharistic rite. The priest is a medium through which sacred language opens itself to the communicant. In a similar way, the poet strives to offer his poem as a sacrament. He seeks to open language to new interpretations by building on a deeper sacramental logic, thereby inviting his audience to participate in something divine, to realise Christ's presence and to receive His grace. In this sense, sacramental language and poetic language have something in common: Through sacraments the divine manifests itself in particular things (the accidents of wine and bread); similarly poetry condenses an unseen reality into something physical and concrete, namely into words. Thus, the verbal ritual in poetry, like the ritualistic actions of a sacrament (the ritualistic breaking and offering of the bread in the Mass) becomes the medium for participation and communion. Like a sacrament, the poem causes grace in the process of signifying it.[144]

However, the poet's task is comparatively more difficult than that of the priest: He is not merely a medium, he is an active wielder of words: "Whereas the priest *inherits* a sacramental language, the religious poet must try to *infuse* his words

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[142] See E. J. McNees, *Eucharistic Poetry, the Search for Presence in the Writings of John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, and Geoffrey Hill* (London and Toronto 1992), pp. 17-18.

[143] The poet and artist David Jones made the same claim in "Art and Sacrament", in *Epoch and Artist.*

[144] It was the teaching of Thomas of Aquinas that sacraments are signs that proclaim faith and that "sacraments cause grace insofar as they signify it." (see *Summa Theologica*, III, pp. 60-65, quoted in McBrien, *Catholicism*, p. 734). Hopkins' emphasis on the role of the sacrament as a sign, rather than on the causality of the sacraments suggests his interest in the renewal of a sacramental approach to both religion and poetry and is essentially a rediscovery and a celebration of the Thomistic perspective.

with sacramental power".[145] In the act of making, he activates that part which reflects God's being in him. Hopkins was able to attempt this because he believed in the power and tangibility of the word which he derived from the Incarnation and the conviction that all words originate in Christ, the one Word. His attempt to reveal Christ through poetry was based on the belief that the original Word was translated into Christ on earth. Since for Hopkins all words ultimately derived from Christ, words could be compressed back into the Logos. Thus, the materialised Word of God could be returned to God by the poet who attempts to consecrate it and evoke His presence. Consequently, as McNees holds, the successful poem enacts the eucharistic process. It encourages the reader to sacrifice intellect to faith. The moment of this sacrifice is the culmination of Real Presence in the reader. Ideally, the poem helps to grant communion with God, just as the daily re-enactment of the Incarnation in the Mass is the manifestation and guarantee of communion.[146] Thus, in Hopkins' view, the primal bifurcation between God and language caused by the Fall is redeemed by Christ's sacrifice. The doctrine of redemption gives language a second chance to redeem itself; it heals the split between the word and its referent and restores both to a single presence. This attitude to language and the word, rooted in the Eucharistic sacrament, provides the poet with an approach to poetry in which he aspires towards a sacramental interaction between word and world. In trying to find an activating principle with which to break open language to presence and create a new awareness of language's capacity to reveal a sacred reality, Hopkins had to find a language that could sever words from inherited patterns and recombine them anew; a language that could re-infuse words with the life of actual experience; a language that works on two levels, the secular and sacred, the real and the sacramental; a language that enables the audience to retain the familiar and the literal and perceive the sacramental at the same time.[147]

For words to bear meaning beyond their simplest denotations, the poet hopes to dislocate meaning first in order to re-locate it. He seeks to de-familiarise his

[145] See Eleanor J. McNees, *Eucharistic Poetry*, p. 18

[146] McNees takes the analogy even further when she holds that "The goal of a poem as sacrament is to operate like the Prayer of Consecration, to effect the Real Presence of Christ within the reader." See E. McNees, "Beyond the Half-way House: Hopkins and Real Presence", in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 31 (1989), p. 86.

[147] This view of language builds on the analogical validity of both religious and poetic language, or as M. Ellsberg states, it requires a "fiduciary" response: "Just as the fiduciary view of a sacrament requires that the believer consent to identify an element not only by its apparent accidents [e.g. bread or wine in the Mass] but also by its unseen substance [body of Christ], likewise the fiduciary view of language requires a 'complex act of inference and assent' for words to bear meaning beyond their simplest referent." See M. Ellsberg, *Created to Praise. The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford 1987), p. 47. Ellsberg draws heavily on J. Coulson's study *Newman and the Common Tradition. A Study in the Language of Church and Society* (Oxford 1970), p. 4.

readers in order to re-familiarise them with a view of language that was once bound up with a pre-scientific and pre-Cartesian spirit. T. S. Eliot argued that such a vision was lost after the mid-seventeenth century, resulting in what he termed a "dissociation of sensibility". In his study on the de-sacramentalisation and dissociation in theological and artistic expression, Hillis Miller follows this when he holds that the history of modern western literature is the history of the splitting apart of the communion of man, nature and God. Tracing the spiritual situation and the existence of a unified religious vision from the medieval world to its complete break up in the nineteenth and twentieth century he concludes:

> In that old harmony man, society, nature and language mirrored one another, like so many voices in a madrigal or fugue. The idea of the Incarnation was the ultimate basis for this harmony. But it was precisely belief in the Incarnation which gradually died out of the European consciousness. The Reformation, if not immediately, certainly in its ultimate effects, meant a weakening of belief in the sacrament of communion.[148]

Miller holds that as faith weakened, so did the belief in the world's (as in fact the word's) ability to create presence. However, although Miller argues that the belief in an immanent God had given way to a detached or transcendent God by the Victorian period, Hopkins resisted this movement. The perceived loss made him (as well as other modern poets including Brown) attempt to discover a revelatory language with which to redeem himself and his world and to attempt a recovery of the Christian sacramental sign by struggling against a dead and overused language and by exploring the poetic resonance of traditional Christian symbols. Interestingly, when Hopkins developed his crucial poetic and religious ideas which eventually made him discover an activating principle whereby language could be sacramentalised and opened to presence, he was writing no poetry at all; after becoming a Jesuit in 1868 he decided to write no more as he felt it would not be appropriate for his profession. However, during his self-imposed silence of seven years he gradually came to believe that there was in fact a spiritual justification for writing poetry: it could be part of his vocation and serve God as a means of praise and giving glory to Him and the mystery of His creation. He arrived at the point where he felt able to mould both vocations, that of priest and poet into one and find an aesthetic and at the same time a religious justification for his art. This was achieved by applying the aesthetic and spiritual insights he had gained through his close observations of nature and his perception of Inscapes in nature to poetry. The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola – the meditations that are the central study and practice of every Jesuit – finally crystallised his ideas as to how to sacramentalise his art and create Inscape in poetry. The

[148] See J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God*, pp. 5-6.

Spiritual Exercises open with the words: "Man was created to praise." Commenting on this Hopkins observed:

> God's utterance of himself is God the Word, outside himself is this world. This world then is word, expression, news of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport, its meaning is God and its life or work to name and praise him. [...] the world, man, should after its own manner give God being in return for the being he has given it.[149]

He held that the world came into being through the word of God; thus it is expression, news of God. Its purpose is to "selve", allow each individual thing to selve, act itself out and show itself in various Inscapes and shapes. Since Inscape is connected to order and its perception in natural things, the poet seeks to unite in language the kind of order and purpose he finds in nature; he aims to make the Inscapes he creates in language rhyme with those of God. Because in Hopkins' sacramental view of the world the poet has a place, the being he renders back to God is not only himself, as Storey rightly points out, but also the things he creates.[150] In order to praise God and make art serve a religious purpose, he has to create Inscapes himself and offer them to God as God offered Himself and the world's being to him. Thus, Inscape and Instress are means of uncovering sacramental presence. In his way the poet seeks to achieve what God has achieved; he seeks to create Inscapes and offer them to his readers in an anamnesis of God's offering, thus giving God being. He returns the inscaped words (which he opened in the event of the poem to new and deeper interpretations) as well as the readers' hearts – who have agreed to be the participants in this divine communion by sacrificing intellect to faith – to God. In the same sense as in the Mass where God, man and the words spoken at the altar participate in each other and are at one in the Eucharist, in a sacramental poem the signification of things and the presence of God is completed by means of words. The poem becomes a verbal ritual that initiates the sacramental anamnesis of Christ. The reader's task is

> to capture the inscaped Word in the act of reading and to realize Christ's presence. The poem is analogous to the Prayer of Consecration in which Christ's words are recalled and offered to the people. In the Eucharist the priest inscapes Christ in the elements through the Prayer of Consecration. In the poem the poet seeks to consecrate words, to reanimate them by means of rhetorical devices which effect a divine presence.[151]

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[149] See GMH, *The Sermons and Devotional Writings*, 7/8/1882, quoted in M. Bottrall (ed.), *Gerard Manley Hopkins, poems: A Casebook* (London 1975), p. 29. Referring to this, G. Storey has pointed out that the *Spiritual Exercises* provided for Hopkins the most compelling of all reasons to break his silence and re-dedicate as a poet. See G. Storey, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Windsor 1984), p. 10

[150] GMB, see "Anne Bevan, Sculptor", in *Following a Lark*: "To make things is to do well" (p. 15).

[151] See McNees, "Beyond the Half-way House", p. 92.

Hopkins based his poetic and priestly ability to inscape language on the prior acknowledgement of the Inscapes he perceived in nature and which he regarded as signs of grace. Pattern and beauty triggered in him the wish to create Inscapes himself in order to be able to revive God's presence on earth in his own poetic creation. Because he believed that words are generated through the Word of Christ, all language that man speaks links him literally to Christ.

> This equation of Christ with the Word refutes metaphor and upholds Hopkins' theory that separate words and objects are internally linked to each other through their origin in Christ the Logos. Language is thus charged with a sacramental reality that finds its most significant symbol in the Eucharist where the communicant actually digests the Word and literally mingles the substance of flesh with that of Christ.[152]

As a result, Hopkins came to invest everything with what Maurice B. McNamee called a "double sacramentalism". Not only had he learned to see nature "charged with the grandeur" and the Inscapes of God; he had also come to believe that he had to inscape it by means of words.[153]

[152] Ibid., p. 100

[153] See M. B. McNamee, S. J., "Hopkins: Poet of Nature and of the Supernatural", in *Immortal Diamond*, p. 242.

3.2 "The Inscape must be dwelt on": Hopkins and Inscape

Some of the ways Hopkins attempted to inscape his poetry were by dislocating ordinary syntax (through metaphor, paradox, hyperbole etc.) and by re-infusing it with a new rhythm. The most significant of his disruptive rhetorical devices contributed to a severe compression of multiple meanings. McNees thinks that Hopkins had to break down the reader's resistance to revelatory language, de-familiarise in order to re-fresh an imaginative approach. She points out that in order to inscape the gracing process Hopkins tried to make his syntax mime the content in order to show the inseparability of word and meaning. His poems employ syntactically disruptive tropes to "jolt the reader out of a typically linear and referential way of reading" as well as to "break apart fixed denotations and to open the poem to sacramental connotations".[154]

Related to the Inscape of poetry is the attempt to heighten the current language. Heightened, or inscaped language differs from automatised language. It foregrounds certain lexical and syntactic features against the norm of the standard. Analysing Hopkins' heightening devices James Milroy clarifies how Hopkins hoped to inscape language; he points out that Hopkins' heightening or inscaping devices occur on three levels: the lexical, the phonetic, the syntactic.[155] On a lexical level, Hopkins developed many inscaping words, as his early journals demonstrate when he talks about cloudscapes or about the sea, rivers, mountains, trees, flowers etc.[156] Moreover, the metaphorical transfer of vocabulary from one semantic field to another is a common resource of the language that Hopkins used extensively: one can, for instance, transfer motion-words like "waves" from sea-vocabulary in which they are commonly applied, to other uses (waves in the hair, sound-waves etc.). The final effect is one of complex sense impression, or of strain and tension, all of which are parts of the special effects of his poetry. Milroy further holds that Hopkins' heightening of language is based on intensity of two kinds, the one achieved by repetition, as in spoken language, and the other by compression, which is not so characteristic of speech. However, heightening by means of syntax, especially in later poems, is more commonly brought about by compression. Hopkins was also fond of premodifying constructions of the kind typified by the German pre-noun insert "das hinter der Kirche stehende Haus"; the "behind-the-church-standing house", or the

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[154] See McNees, *Eucharistic Poetry*, p. 21.

[155] See James Milroy, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 113 ff. It is not my intention to give a compehensive discussion of Hopkins' ways of heightening and thus inscaping of language. For more information see Milroy, especially Part II; also J. R. Watson, *The poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London 1987), especially pp. 50-56; "Techniques and Poetic Language".

[156] Milroy refers to this as a "vocabulary of inscape", see p. 168.

"not-by-morning-matched face"(no. 59).[157] Hopkins' method is to compress what might otherwise be a series of clauses as in "The rolling level underneath him steady air". Characteristic of noun-modifying constructions as "dapple-dawn-drawn" is their ambiguity. Nominalisation is another of his favourite syntactic devices, as in "The achieve of".[158] Moreover, Hopkins thought that the governing structural principles in the mind as well as in poetry are based on juxtaposition and contrast. He concluded that the perception of beauty and Inscape, and its creation in art, relied on comparison: "comparison for likeness sake and comparison for unlikeness sake".[159] The common principle underlying this process of comparison is identified as that of parallelism:

> The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism [...] But parallelism is of two kinds [...] – where the opposition is clearly marked, and where it is transitional rather or chromatic. [...] To the marked or abrupt kind of parallelism belong metaphor, simile, parable [...] where the effect is sought in likeness of things, and antithesis, contrast, [...] where it is sought in unlikeness.[160]

Applied to the inscaping process in poetry this principle was significant since Hopkins believed that "Parallelism in expression tends to beget or passes into parallelism in thought".[161] His attempts to inscape sound are partly influenced by his theories on parallelism. Drawing on the analogy between linguistic sound and musical sound he believed that sound could echo sense and inscaped sound could show the content or meaning he intended to create. Thus, for Hopkins marked and unmarked parallelisms (in the form of metaphor, simile, antithesis, juxtaposition and contrast) are not just figures of speech applied for linguistic or poetic variety, but important devices of inscaping language and inscaping the word as sign.[162]

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[157] Ibid., pp. 200 and 210.

[158] Ibid., p. 221 ff.

[159] In "On the Origin of Beauty", Hopkins suggests that "To perceive the likeness and difference of things, or their relation, we must compare them [...]. Beauty therefore is a relation, and the apprehension of it a comparison. The sense of beauty [...] is a comparison." See *The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Humphrey House (London 1937), pp. 65-66. Taking this to the level to poetry, he goes on to explain that the governing principles in the mind as well as in poetry are based on parallelism (ibid., p. 93).

[160] Ibid., p. 93.

[161] Ibid.; One simple implication of this can be seen when applied to rhyme. Rhyme "shows forth the proportion of disagreement with agreement [...] but also the points in a work of art [...] where the principle of beauty is to be strongly marked". This means that in poetry not only the phonological sequence but in the same way any sequence of semantic units strives to build an equation. The phonological structure and the semantic structure influence and condition each other reciprocally. The dialectic of resemblance and difference, harmony and disharmony generates the unity of the poem.

[162] Hopkins considered parallelism in sound and grammatical structure as a means of breaking the sameness of rhythm. He did not think this would break the unity of verse but, on the contrary, that it could make verse "organic" "and what is organic is one". See "Rhythm and the other Structural parts of Rhetoric and Verse", in *The Notebooks and Papers of GMH*, ed. by Humphrey House (London 1937), p. 241.

3.3 The need for a "new poetry": Brown and Inscape

Making religious assertions poses problems to poets since they have to attempt to refer to things that are mostly beyond ordinary human experience. For a modern poet this problem is even more urgent because of the break up of a single vision and a common language. Brown was fully aware of the wounding of an authentic sacramental Christian tradition and the loss of the ancient relationship between belief and imagination. He was aware of this process of "dissociation" and the effect on modern life, culture and language, and he deplored that during the past century religion has gradually ceased to be part of the living literary culture. Moreover he knew that religious faith was a problem for a sceptical age and his autobiography attests to his feeling that "most people nowadays will have nothing to do with that".[163] He also thought that religious language was often regarded as meaningless and out of touch because it was not felt to be easily accessible or because it was seen as being anachronistic and remote from contemporary culture and the spirit of the time. John Coulson who analysed the break up of a single vision and its effects on the language of religion explains:

> Once the connections between the primary forms of faith (its metaphors and symbols) are loosened, the language of religion ceases to nourish the hitherto common language of church and society. As religious words and expressions fall out of use, so the secular sentiments they stand for fade with them, and a common language no longer exists. The language of belief is then felt as an alien rhetoric without power to affect social and political actions. [164]

The early Christian vision and grasp of existence had a dynamic and mythical character. Primary forms of faith were preserved in metaphors, symbols and myths. The miracle of the Incarnation, the word made flesh, was real and brought God back to earth in the form of a human being, Christ, who was seen to be the mediator between a fallen world and the kingdom of God. The communion service too was a form of the participation and the presence of God. Nature and human history were perceived to be full of symbols of divine truth. Created things as well as art and literature were not merely signs pointing to something separate from man:

> The Eucharist was the archetype of the divine analogy whereby created things participated in the supernatural reality they signified. Poetry in turn was, in one way or another, modelled on sacramental or scriptural language. The words of the poem incarnated the things they named, just as the words of the Mass shared in the transformation they evoked. The symbols and metaphors of poetry were no mere inventions of the poets. They were borrowed from the divine analogy of nature. Poetry was meaningful in the same way as nature itself – by a communion of the verbal symbols with the reality they named.[165]

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[163] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 185.
[164] See J. Coulson, *Religion and Imagination. "In aid of a grammar of assent"* (Oxford 1981), p. 82.
[165] See Miller, *The Dissapearance of God*, p. 3

Whereas early Christian and medieval societies had been able to experience the divine sacramental power as immediately present in nature and society, drastic changes occurred after the Reformation. The Eucharist as the celebration of Christ's mystical body and the sacraments ceased to have any claim to validity. In *Poetry and Dogma*, a study of the consequences of the Protestant revision of Eucharistic dogma on religious poetry in England, Malcom Mackenzie Ross states that Calvinism annihilated the Catholic Eucharistic symbols and destroyed the analogical awareness of the simultaneous presence of the mystical and the historical body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine on the altar. It also destroyed the corporate sense of participation in the redemptive sacrificial act: Christ's death happened a long time ago and was to be remembered but could not be experienced. Thus, the tradition and the organic vision of man, nature and God that Catholicism had provided and that had been strengthened by its sacramentalism and symbolism was destroyed by the anti-sacramentalism of the Reformers.[166] Brown felt that the break up of a single unifying vision and the inability to make sense of the world as one consistent whole, interlocking the human with the divine had devastating effects not only on the spiritual life but also on art, literature and the language of poetry:

> Suddenly the violent change to Calvinism was thrust on them. Their sacraments were forbidden and squandered; their altars and images put down; black preachers solemnly impressed on them that their strivings towards the consummation of heaven would avail them nothing, since either their salvation or their damnation was sealed before the beginning of the world. From that time on incarnate angels and demons toiled in the fields, and the estate of 'dear and dogged man' was broken up and refashioned. Innocence gave place to a dark, brooding awareness. [...] From that time, too, the old music and poetry died out, because the single vision which is the source of all art had been choked. Poets followed priests into the darkness.[167]

Faced with this and inspired by Hopkins' attempts at a sacramental repossession of nature, man and God, Brown defined the responsibility and task of the artist:

> to keep in repair the sacred web of creation – that cosmic harmony of God and beast and man and star and plant – in the name of humanity.[168]

Brown regarded the artist's role as essentially a Christ-like and purposeful one. As a consequence however, the artist has to pay a price for the privilege of his role by having to sacrifice his art to the needs of his community:

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[166] See Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, *Poetry and Dogma. The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth Century English Poetry* (New York 1969); especially chapters I and II. His argument rests on the assumption that the dogmatic symbolism of the traditional Eucharistic rite had nourished the analogical mode of poetic symbols and had "effected imaginatively a poetic knowledge of the participation [...] of the natural, the historical, and the divine orders." (Foreword). He holds that the capacity of the Eucharistic symbol in poetry to function simultaneously at the levels of the natural, the historical, and the divine is threatened and eventually lost in the course of the seventeenth century.

[167] See GMB, "The Broken Heraldry" in Karl Miller, p. 146.

[168] See GMB, "Sealksin", in *Hawkfall and Other Stories*, p. 139.

> when the wounds of Christ are forgotten, a new saint must offer hands and feet and side. The poet, when the worm is in the corn, must lose his way in the street of images between plough and the oven. [169]

He has to offer his craft in remembrance of the ancient sacrifice. Aware of the consequences, Brown affirms:

> An artist must pay dearly in terms of human tenderness for the fragments of beauty that lie about in his workshop.[170]

Nevertheless, because Brown liked to think of himself as "some kind of minor prophet, endowed with special perceptions: one who warns as well as celebrates"[171] he accepted the responsibility as a guardian of language and a poet-priest. In order to rebuild a more wholesome vision he had to start with language and the word:

> Language unstable as sand, but poets
> Strike on hard rock, carving
> Rune and hieroglyph, to celebrate
> Breath's sweet brevity. [...]
>
> Keep vigil. The tongues flow yet
> To rhythms of sea and hill.
> Deeper than stone, guard
> The pure source, silence. ("To a Hamnavoe Poet of 2093", *FaL*, pp. 13-14)

In *An Orkney Tapestry* he contemplates the decay and the erosion of language and of words as well as the loss of the gift of wonderment:

> Word and name are drained of their ancient power. [...] We have come a long way in a few years. It is the word, blossoming as legend, poem, story, secret, that holds a community together and gives a meaning to its life. If words become functional ciphers merely, [...] they lose their "ghosts" – the rich aura that has grown about them from the start, and grows infinitesimally richer every time they are spoken. They lose more; they lose their "kernel", the sheer sensuous relish of utterance. Poetry is a fine interpretation of ghost and kernel. We are in danger of contenting ourselves with husks. [...] Decay of language is always the symptom of a more serious sickness.[172]

Thus, some new relationship with language and poetry was needed. Brown draws on Hopkins and the tradition he worked in when he proposes:

> some kind of new poetry [...] seems called for, something along the lines that Eliot and Pound explored (bravely but not with entire success). Probably only Hopkins up to now has seen what the future of the language of poetry must be, but other poets [...] will have to find their own way.[173]

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[169] See GMB, *A Spell for Green Corn*, p. 84.
[170] See GMB, "Sealskin", in *Hawkfall*, p. 134.
[171] See GMB, "Oilscene", in *Scotland* (January 1973), p. 51.
[172] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, pp. 21-23. Also see "The lords of hell and the word: a poem for Burns day". *Following a Lark*, pp. 41-42; and "To a Hamnavoe poet" (ibid, pp. 13-14).
[173] See GMB, essay for "Books in Scotland", MS (16/11/1978), in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 2134/2/2.

Hopkins encouraged Brown to attempt a restoration of a more unified sensibility by trying to recover the capacity of language and poetry to penetrate again the whole world of knowledge and experience. Reflecting the literary developments and poetic trends of the past decades as well as his own literary growth he acknowledged Hopkins not only as a major force in shaping modern poetry but he also admired his belief in sacramentalism and his contribution to renewing the word in the light of The Word which was based on the poet's conviction that words can be charged with divinity and that, like the sacraments themselves, they can be outward signs of invisible grace. By turning to Hopkins for inspiration Brown became part of the process of a repossession of the word and sacramental art. Like Hopkins, he believed that words hold a mystery, a "ghost" and that they provide a fundamental sense of coherence and unity since they partake in something divine and sacred. Consequently, language has the power to "open the sacred quarry", pointing to the mystery of the original Word:

> Language, open the sacred quarry.
> Pagan in clouds, a stone image,
> She guards the field, the river, the birds.
>
> The dark hills roll across her silence. [...]
>
> Build an arch of hard square words.
> April flows from her wounded hands.
> The gentle beasts and legends gather.
>
> Carved on broken stone, at the well
> A stag runs, hard in light, before
> The fading tangle of hound and horn.
>
> Stone and litany fold her now.
> Stand in the poem, nude cold girl,
> Till the Word wakes and all stones die. ("The Image in the Hills", *YoW*, p. 34.)

While believing in the potential of the imagination to create life-giving images (pagan or Christian) Brown was aware of the healing power of the poetic word as well as its limits. Although the poet's language can open a "sacred quarry", enabling him as symbol-maker to break from it images and words like stones that he has to form, carve and chisel in the act of "building" a poem as a place of worship[174] (thereby demonstrating the creative presence of divinity within man's language), he also suggests that the poet's word is "carved on broken stone", being only a fragment of the Word. However, Brown's message is that for now poetry and religious ceremonies and rituals ("Stone and litany") will have to do; the poet celebrates and contemplates the mystery behind the man-made word, image or inscaped thing: "Till

[174] What starts as a (stone) image in the first stanza is later made into an "arch of hard square words". Eventually, "stone and litany fold her now" (perhaps a pagan or Christian statue) suggesting that a place of worship (perhaps a church) was built where the image is worshipped "till the Word" wakes.

the Word wakes and all stones die". Elsewhere, Brown recognises the inherently paradoxical nature of language and poetry when he ponders the possibility of a return to the original Word.

> I think often of the boundless power of words. A word made everything in the beginning. [...] What is poetry...? A futile yearning towards a realisation of that marvellous Word. What is all poetry but a quest for the meaning and beauty and majesty of the original Word? [175]

But although he was aware of this dilemma, he was thrilled by the thought that the poet's word partakes in something sacred and is a "shadow of Creation":

> Without the Word, that called all creation into being – the seven-syllabled word, whose last syllable is peace, completion, goodness, resolution – the words of the suffering poet could not come into being. I have mentioned the healing aspect of poetry: the pouring of oil and wine. Part of it comes from the work well-achieved: the poet himself, and all his readers and listeners, feel the wounds and the bruises [...] but the pattern, the song, the dance more than make up for all. Without the Creator, the lesser creations of poet, artist, musician could not be. We affirm as best we can "in part", brokenly.[176]

Just as Christ is a symbol of both brokenness and wholeness, each word, though it is a broken word, has healing power. Just as each self is a fragment of Christ, each man-made object is a repetition of the divine act of creation. Each word is partaking in The Word and is therefore regarded by poets like Hopkins and Brown as the locus of healing. Thus it is the poet's task to restore the ancient unity of religion and literature, to revivify ancient symbols and to re-familiarise readers with a sacramental vision of the world.[177]

In order to heal the fissure in people's minds Brown felt that a re-interpretation of religious and poetic language was needed and that language must not be removed from ordinary human experience or rely on a metaphysical jargon. Accordingly, he attempted to take language back to ordinary everyday experience and its primal and communal roots. For him, the reference for theological language was not transcendental objects, but human experience. Inspired by Hopkins and his own theories about the heightening of ordinary speech, Brown sought to achieve a sense of the everyday and of ordinary experience in his poetry. In so doing he demonstrated his belief that religion is not something special, meant for Sundays or holy days and having its place in the church, but bound up with the concerns of every day. Hence,

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[175] See GMB, "The Seven poets" in *The Sun's Net* (Edinburgh 1976), p. 260.

[176] Ibid., pp. 153-154. The healing aspect of poetry has to do with its eucharistic aspect. The well-achieved work, the inscaped work equals a sacrament in which the poet as well as his readers "feel the wounds and the bruises" in an anamnesis of Christ's suffering. They participate in it and are redeemed by the poet's inscaping process that results in the pattern, the "song", the "dance".

[177] That the act of remembering has a healing effect is also suggested by Brown when he writes: "There is a jar of balm. The story, the music, the image." See *The Sea-King's Daughter* (Nairn 1991), p. 46.

in *Magnus*, the underlying pattern of agricultural life is depicted as a life-giving spiritual pattern; agriculture itself is likened to an act of faith:

> Now that the seed was uttered upon the land the peasants waited for the sun and rain to do their bit. What they had performed was an act of faith. They trusted that the seed they had buried would return from the grave.[178]

Also, in "The Feast at Paplay" Brown suggests that such religious assertions as "The Lord is risen", will only bear meaning when seen in the context of everyday life:

> "The Lord is risen", said Thora [...]. Does that mean nothing to you? Of course it means nothing if one does not see all the actions of Christ's life in the events of every day.[179]

In "A Treading of Grapes", by stressing the ordinariness and familiarity of the occasion and the language and the characters in the gospel account of the wedding feast at Cana, he implies that Father Halcrow's sermon on the miracle of Cana is theologically very effective.[180]

While trying to achieve a sense of immediacy and the everyday in his language, Brown wished to retain a sense of ceremony and ritual at the same time ("pattern" and "dance"). He sought to find a language that could compress (like the Prayer of Consecration or the sacraments in general) eschatological and historical time, a language of multiple voices, of past, present and future, into the specific moment of the poem. As in the eucharistic ceremony in the Mass, the verbal ceremony of the poem had to become the locus of the encounter with Christ, opening up levels of reality and time that transcend the Now and the Real.[181] His autobiography reveals that thoughts about the potential of the word and the lesser arts, as well as Hopkins' corresponding ideas regarding the inscaping of poetry and the process of taking the word back to its divine origin in an act of thanksgiving and praise, had occupied his mind for a long time. He is close to Hopkins when he ponders the possibility of art and literature to return the word to God's original Word:

> *In principio erat verbum.* Can it be that those beauties of literature and all the arts are a striving to return to that immaculate beginning ? – the word lost in The Word.[182]

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[178] See GMB, *Magnus*, p. 85.
[179] See GMB, *Andrina and Other Stories*, p. 108.
[180] See GMB, *A Time to Keep*, pp. 63-76.
[181] What Brown had felt earlier when commenting on the Mass and Christ's sacrifice and its ability to transcend ordinary time is confirmed by Aquinas' definition of the sacramental sign :"The sacrament is a commemorative sign of what has gone before, I mean the passion of Christ; and a demonstrative sign of what is being brought about in us through the passion of Christ, that is, grace; and a prognostic sign, that is, a prophetic sign of future glory". See *Summa Theologica*, III, Qs. 60, Art. 3.
[182] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 57.

Although the poet's work can only partly evoke or recreate the original Word he yet regarded it as his task to recreate the miraculous atmosphere once associated with religion, to rescue the word of God from "the cold hands of the ministers of the kirk"[183], to restore it to living experience and make art "once more the handmaid of religion, as it had been in Greece and in the Europe of the Middle Ages".[184] Thus, in his way Brown followed Hopkins' belief that "the world, man, should after its own manner give God being in return for the being he has given it".

[183] See GMB, *A Spell for Green Corn* (London 1970), where he writes that "The Word was imprisoned between black boards, and chained and padlocked, in the pulpit of the kirk – impossible to get free among the ploughs and the nets [...]. Therefore the lesser word, the [...] poem, the rune, must work the miracle of bread" (p. 90).

[184] See GMB, "Sealskin", in *Hawkfall*, p. 136.

3.4 "Keeping the flame alive": Brown's inscaping of language

> *How to keep [...]*
> *Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty...from vanishing away? [...]*
> *Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver (GMH)* [185]

Brown embraces the theologically inspired concept of Inscape, or what he was in the habit of calling pattern, when he explains why he thinks that "some kind of new poetry" is needed:

> In much contemporary verse the language is dull and mean and lacks pattern. [...] With ceremonial verse a pure kind of language is called for – a grave ordering of words – [...]. Ceremonial poems, I think, are the poems that will last because they seem not to be the language of one man only but speak for a whole people. The great moments of poetry have this prophetic ceremonial quality, upborne by a history and an ethos: Isaiah, Ecclesiastes. It is rare in modern poetry. [...] Ceremony in poetry, if it isn't the same thing as religion, at least lives next door to it.[186]

Like Hopkins, whose heightening of language was based on the intensity of repetition and compression, Brown's language and inscaping process is marked by his looking in two directions: to ritual, elaboration and ceremony on the one hand, and to simplicity and compression on the other. Brown explained this impulse as

> an urge on the one hand to compress, and on the other to make elaborate kennings out of ordinary matters.[187]

Corresponding to this double aesthetic one can hear at least two distinct rhythms and voices in his works: the recurring poetic cadences, accents, sound-patterns of heightened speech (the poet's artifice) and the semantic rhythms of sense (the prose-rhythm of ordinary speech).[188] McGrath thinks that one of the most impressive features of Brown's poetry is that there is no single poetic voice; rather he speaks convincingly in a few different voices: private, formal and ritualistic.[189] Murray and Tait have pointed out that the effectiveness of Brown's Norse diction in *Greenvoe* is due to the different chapters being related in two other narrative voices apart from the traditional saga voice: a prosaic twentieth-century voice and a late medieval one which expresses a very different view of life. The main impact is in the juxtaposition

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[185] See GMH, "The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo".
[186] See GMB, in a review of C. J. Moore's *In the Beginning*, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 2845.1
[187] See GMB, introduction to *Orkney Short Stories* (Stromness 1983), p. 10.
[188] In Brown's works, different genres, voices, speech-rhythms and styles are frequently approximated which results in a blurring of such boundaries. David Annwn has noted that "In his recent writing, the seam between devotional poems, imagistic exercises, runic cuttings, "occasional" poems and children's stories seems to be increasingly fading". See "The Fresh Echo", in *Poetry Wales* 27, no. 2, p. 23.
[189] See John McGrath, "The Orkney Tapestry of George Mackay Brown", Chapter IV, p. 76.

of these voices, a technique that Brown also used to great effect in *Magnus*.[190] The effectiveness of heightened language depends on the presence of other voices and the cadences and rhythms of ordinary and simple speech, just as the perception and the making or instressing of Inscape, beauty and design depends on the juxtaposition of different viewpoints and perspectives; – an observation Hopkins had already made by the time he wrote his essay on Beauty: "to perceive the likeness and difference of things, or their relation, we must compare them, [...] Beauty therefore is a relation, and the apprehension of it a comparison."[191] Such a contrasting method with its juxtaposition and interaction of voices and viewpoints has a polyphonic and dynamic quality, something Brown uses frequently in his verse and his prose. It is a means of "putting song back" into language and it also helped Brown to explore the various facets of human experience and people's states of mind – some of the major forces behind the poet's concept of reality and truth.[192] Brown's imaginative approach to the way individuals cope with death, love, shipwrecks, failed harvests, and nature in all her terrible aspects is always situated in the context of man, since it is the life of ordinary and "dogged man" that is a paradigm for the constant struggle for survival and the fight with the elements. Brown celebrated the encounter of the human soul with nature and God in nature; he accepted the perceived paradoxes of life and wished to show his readers that while misery and suffering are permanent threats, they are part of the beauty and mystery of existence. He regarded it as his task to educate his readers and help them perceive the beauty and Inscape of God's creation, – the beauty of which one could not perceive without having the darker side against which the light can be shown. Accordingly, in "Farm Labourer" Brown juxtaposes different voices and perspectives in his exploration of truth, reality and the Inscape or design of things:

> "God, am I not dead yet?" said Ward, his ear
> Meeting another dawn.
> A blackbird, lost in leaves, began to throb
> And on the pier

[190] In this novel Brown juxtaposes the voices of the hagiographer, recounting the temptations of "the holy martyr Magnus", a saga-voice at the beginning of "The Killing" and the voices of the twentieth-century media. The existence of a "ritual" voice Brown explains thus: "to celebrate the mystery properly the story teller must give way to a ritual voice" (*Magnus*, p. 16). See also R. Murray, *Style as Voice*. For Brown, art is not about realism, but about the imagination. Thus, reality and truth are approached through various points of view since, as Brown thinks, the scape of truth and reality is "diversity and abundance and flow and fall and aspiring [...] seemingly so various, [...] yet a unity." Because the "scape" is always changing and because man himself is a "centre of infinite horizons", he is "always questing, never satisfied". See *For the Islands I sing*, p. 157.

[191] From "On the Origin of Beauty: A Platonic Dialogue", p.65

[192] The technique of approaching a single event from the viewpoint of several different people is used to great effect in *The Year of the Whale*. See "Hamnavoe Market", "Shipwreck", "The Funeral of Ally Flett", "Saul Scarth" (*WoA*), and is a popular device in Brown's prose too.

The gulls stretched barbarous throats
Over the creels, the haddock lines, the boats.
His mortal pain
All day hung tangled in that lyrical web.
"Seventy years I've had of this", said Ward,
"Going in winter dark
To feed the horse, a lantern in my fist,
Snow in my beard,
Then thresh in the long barn
Bread and ale out of the skinflint corn,
And such-like work!"
And a lark flashed its needle down the west. ("Farm Labourer", *YoW*, p. 23)

The commentator's voice is heightened and poetic; Ward's speech is marked by the use of more colloquial and ordinary phrases although his presentation of simple images of his working life are graceful and poetic too (the possible inversion of adjective and noun in "winter dark" would indicate poetic heightening). However, although Ward's life has been hard and though he is old, ill and tired, the poet's ability to see the farmer's life as part of a "lyrical web" is striking. This contrast of perspectives is epitomised in the last line where the poet's sensitivity to and celebration of nature's beauty is symbolised by the flight of the lark. Since his eyes and heart are open to the vividness and design in nature he reminds his readers of it, instresses his work in order to point out nature's Inscapes and patterns.[193] This is one way in which Brown hoped to re-fresh people's minds and re-alert them to objects, ideas, events, and the overall mystery and beauty of their lives, since: "Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember how deep the Inscape in things is."[194]

The juxtaposition of at least two different voices and viewpoints corresponds to the juxtaposition of at least two different meanings. Commenting on Hopkins' attempts to charge his language with such a double power and vision Gerald L. Bruns observes that it is important for poets and their readers to "learn a special literacy (divination), whereby we understand one thing (the divine) in the language of another (the human)".[195] Brown's special literacy is linked to his sacramental vision where the divine is always present within or underneath the human, as Christ is substantially present within or beneath the natural elements of bread and wine in the Eucharist. The sacramentalising of the word and the world is one way that helped Brown to find

[193] This important social and spiritual task of the poet is summed up in "The Poet", where the poet, although his true work is "contemplation of silence" and mystery, has to "move among the folk" in order to bring beauty and happiness and gaiety back to "these sober islands". See GMB, *The Year of the Whale*, p. 22.
[194] See GMH, *Journals and Papers*, p. 205.
[195] See Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History* (New Haven 1982), p. 18.

a poetic form that could combine an individual's perspective on life with a more communal and timeless one. The belief that there is a secular and a sacramental approach to truth energised his search for a poetics that could look two ways at once and that could be read on at least two levels of meaning. This aesthetic considerably influenced his word-craft, his language and poetic diction. Like other poets, Brown used figurative language; as a religious poet he thrived on it. In order to suggest for instance that God is three persons in one, that the bread and wine celebrated in the Eucharist are the body and blood of Christ, that the life of a crofter is basically a repetition of Christ's life, he had to stretch language beyond the literal.[196] From biblical stories and Christ's parables Brown learned that analogy is an effective device which enables people to talk about experiences that go beyond the human. Thus, for a poet of Brown's nature analogy is attractive because it allows language to be rooted in ordinary experience while pointing to something else. In "A Treading of Grapes" Brown demonstrates the effectiveness of analogy in Father Halcrow's sermon; by rooting the occasion of the miracle of Cana in the ordinary everyday experience of the people he renders the miracle more plausible.

Brown's attempt to seek patterns and correspondences between different realms of meaning (e.g. the physical and the spiritual, the secular and the sacramental, past and present) also involves the use of allegory. Many of his stories are open to readings on different planes, suggesting a continuous parallel between two or more levels of meaning. Thus, one way of inscaping language is linked to what Schoene thinks is an attempt to create a universal language of allegory. This is not a language of the past, but a "ritual language transcending all spatial and temporal boundaries".[197] Schoene suggests that allegory presupposes both, the Story and the Fable, the ordinary and the divine, the local and the spiritual. He concludes that Brown's use of allegory, (especially in *Time in a Red Coat* and *Andrina*) is "motivated by his desire to [...] go beyond linear history toward a 'fable of time'".[198]

Brown's poetry too is full of statements which defy literal interpretation and is laden with figurative terms, offering images that have a hidden meaning behind the literal. Many of his poems work by indirection, suggestion and on the grounds of a recognition and acceptance of two or more realities.[199] Brown has given his poetry an

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[196] See for instance lines like the following: "She took the soundless choir of fish/ And a sharp knife/ And went the hundred steps down to the pool in the rock./ *Give us our daily bread*/ She swilled and cut/ And laid psalms and blessing on her dish" ("A Winter Bride", *FwP*, p. 39); or "Christ, crofter, lay kindly on this white beard/ Thy sickle, flail, millstone, keg, oven" (*YoW*, p. 19).

[197] See B. Schoene, *The Making of Orcadia*, p. 241. For a more detailed discussion of Brown's use of allegory see Schoene, pp. 240-257.

[198] Ibid., p. 254.

[199] See for instance his depiction of life in terms of a ship or a sea-voyage, and his allusion to death in

allegorical and symbolical quality by using a range of figures of speech which all help to stretch the reach of words, thereby contributing to the effect of "making strange".[200] His use and creation of images as forms of phanopoeia attest to his poetics of the visual imagination. Images are used to evoke sense-impressions as distinct from the language of abstract argument or exposition. Those images that are constituted of the senses of touch and hearing are especially attractive for Brown because they can contain time within space, providing a pictorial sense of space. Because in an image (often inspired by haiku-forms), deictic words are missing which would elucidate the spatial or temporal context, they contribute to the creation of a timeless atmosphere:

> Dawn opened, a rose
> Upon three travellers asleep.
> The moon
> Drifted from them, a worn
> Washed shell. ("Desert Sleepers", *WoA*, p. 54)

Metaphors, working on the assumption that there are similarities between things help to create new combinations of ideas and enable Brown to talk about intangible or abstract things in concrete ways: "the circle of bread", "the creaking rowlocks of time" ("Thorfinn"), "brutal stations of bread" ("The Year of the Whale"), "the ring of silence" ("Countryman"), "looms of sea" ("Voyager"), "the door of death" ("The Masque of Bread"); "a drift of smiles" ("The Death of Thorkeld"). Frequently, metaphor involves the shift of semantic fields or personification, when something is described in terms which we normally associate with the other as in: "the crucifixion of the seed" ("Chapel between Cornfield and Shore, Stromness").

On a syntactic level Brown uses a variety of heightening techniques elevating his language into the poetical and ceremonial. Brown's musical cadences, his sense of rhythm and pattern, as well as his attempt to invest his poetry with seriousness (the "being in earnest with the subject-reality") and with a language appropriate to it, account for his use of elliptical sentences as in "The wind was fire/ The streets hot funnels" ("That Night in Troy", *LaF*, p. 10) or "The well was lover, the water kisses

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general when he talks about shipwreck.

[200] This idea of refreshing the mind and disrupting habitual perceptions of the world is close to the Formalist doctrine of "making strange" ("ostranenje") and the theories of the British and German Romantic poets. In his influential essay "Art as Technique", the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky argues that art exists in order to recover for us the sensation of life which is diminished in the automatised routine of everyday experience and perception: "as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic.[...] Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*" (ibid.). Since it is not the aim of this study to detect and analyse in detail Brown's linguistic techniques and his poetic language, I shall only point to the more pronounced and striking elements that account for his inscaping of language.

and secrets" ("The Condemned Well", *YoW*, p. 35); hyperbaton (changed and inverted word order for poetic effect as in "Says Semphill then", or "in winter dark"); unmarked parenthesis and insertion of complements such as adjectival, participal clauses or adverbial phrases as qualifiers, as in "Semphill, his hat full of hooks/ Sits drinking ale/ Among the English fishing visitors, [...] Then they, obscurely wise,/ Abandon by the loch their dripping oars" ("Trout Fisher", *YoW*, p. 27); asyndeton (missing out conjunctions) and anaphora (repetition of the same word or phrase). His use of compounds is also highly creative; at times it is evocative of Hopkins: "my skull is the hour glass with few grains. No oar-fold, no sail-furl, but forth-faring". ("The Wreck of the Archangel"), or as in "the storm [...] flung us [...] wave-crossed, God-lost [...] on a rasp of rock" ("The Storm"). Generally, compounding is attractive for Brown because it is economical and, similar to kennings, compounds do not commit themselves to a single interpretation. When alliteration is used to combine the parts of the compound it contributes to the sound of the phrase as in "Book-bent heads", "wind-flung flower" ("Seal Island Anthology, 1875", *SP*, p. 115), or "silvery tell-tale trystings", "grain-gold sea-silvered hands" (ibid., p. 110). Brown enables the compounds we already have (sweetheart, starlight) to split and reform with freshened power: "wavecrash" ("The Wreck of the Archangel") "sunbright", "dawnlight", "dayspring" ("Seal Island Anthology"), "Star-time", "may-flower" (ibid.).

Linked to the poet's exploration of the nature of "the real" and of Inscape is his use of paradox. Paradox and ambiguity are admissions of the limits of logic and expressions of the contradictory nature of experience. Christian doctrines and the language of the Bible are full of paradox and logically contradictory statements. Christ, for instance, is both fully man and fully God, a paradox which imposes limits upon logic and stretches the limits of language.[201] Brown's use of oxymoron and paradox leads further into the complexities of faith and language and attests to his recognition of mystery and uncertainty as in "terrible holy joy" ("The Old Women",

[201] Pascal and Newman, both thinkers whom Brown was familiar with, were profoundly paradoxical theologians because they recognised the deeply contradictory nature of faith which roots its triumph and its glory in suffering and sin. For Brown only faith offers an explanation for the ambiguous and frequently incomprehensible world. The human situation characterised by both suffering and the triumph over it is something that preoccupied Brown. Like T. S. Eliot, who turned to Pascal for an example of paradoxical religious thought and the attempt to hold (as in a poem) apparent contradictions, Brown's reading of Pascal certainly contributed to the insights he had into the ways Hopkins treated the paradox inherent in Christian belief. Christianity alone, according to Pascal's *Pensées,* offers a satisfactory explanation of these contradictions in terms of the fall and the redemption, enabling man to know what kind of paradox he is. Because paradox marks man's condition and is inherent in faith, it is a strong element of Brown's poetry. Because Brown has adopted the crucifixion as archetype of man's spiritual situation, life is full of paradox and ambiguity. It contains both, the element of suffering and the victory over it, or as Pascal called it, man's *greatness* and the *misery*.

LaF, p. 9), "holy greed" ("Hamnavoe", *LaF*, p. 23); or in his description of the sea as "the bounteous terrible harp" ("Wreck of the Archangel", *WoA*, p. 2). John Coulson calls this polar form of expression "paratactic"; he further points out that it is a traditional characteristic of religious consciousness. It is marked by juxtaposition rather than by logical sequence, and is characteristic of medieval Christian sensibility and consciousness.[202] Brown's journey back leads him to embrace and explore anew such a sensibility. His conception of Christianity and life in general is built on something complex and polar rather than logical and singular although he strains towards harmony, wholeness and reconciliation. His work demonstrates that he conceived of religion as well as of art as an ellipsis with at least two foci, a "centre of infinite horizons".[203] The heterogeneous associations evident in his work thrive on the creative tension between dualisms such as body and spirit, life and death, darkness and light, land and sea, pagan and Christian. At times he combines Norse mythology, pagan rituals, battle scenes, modern and ancient sensibilities and welds them into a Christian liturgical whole.[204] This habit of juxtaposing medieval, pagan, and modern images, or images from the Old Testament with themes and images from the New Testament (e.g. Adam and Christ), or placing characters and events from antiquity, pagan or Christian times side by side, doing away with mimetic representations of reality, logical sequence or chronological time in favour of a sacramental view of time, has a paratactic quality. Frequently, oppositions and tensions can only be concluded and resolved within a system of faith, whether it be the Christian or a more secular and humanistic one.

The juxtaposition of voices, themes, events, perspectives and meanings as a variant of Brown's "paratactic consciousness" is mirrored on a syntactic level when sentences and words are juxtaposed without the use of conjunctions (asyndeton) or when they are connected by simple "and"-constructions. Hopkins for instance observed and placed facts side by side; the relation is apprehended in the juxtaposition itself (poetry of co-ordination). Frequently he used "and"-constructions to link his clauses which has the effect of quasi-objectivity; logical, temporal and attitudinal relations that the poet has in mind are apparently suppressed, and the language becomes all the more rich and suggestive for that. This is related to thinking

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[202] This phenomenon is noted by J. Huizinga in *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924), and interpreted by E. Auerbach in *Mimesis*, (1946). See J. Coulson, *Religion and Imagination. "In aid of a grammar of assent"* (Oxford 1981), p. 113. Coulson thinks that wherever poets and novelists conceive of their experience in terms of duality and polarity, it is a sign of the persistence of the religious imagination.

[203] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 157.

[204] In *An Orkney Tapestry* his descriptions of sea-faring in terms of the stations of the cross in which Christ is depicted as a sea-captain, the physical and the symbolical are linked with each other.

aloud and to the grammar of current spoken language. The effect can be that of intensification and immediacy as in Brown's

> an old man standing on a pier among the tall masts
> and salt smells and seagulls,
> just as the evening star appears in the west. [205]

Brown enjoyed exploring apprehending minds and presenting images, objects and concrete things, more than presenting reflections and comments given by the poet, narrator, or a lyrical "I". This achieves full effect in his so-called Rune-poems, where he approaches a terse, skaldic style by the use of parataxis as well as an emphasis on noun-phrases through omission of verbs, nominalisations or derivations of nouns from verbs:

> Horse at trough, thrush in quernstone,
> The five ploughmen
> Much taken up with pewter. [...]
>
> The flames of love, the hammerings, glowings,
> End one way –
> A cold nail on an anvil. ("Hill Runes", *FwP*, p. 71)

His verse is particularly evocative of skaldic poetry when it shares some of its syntactic and stylistic characteristics. Skaldic verse is primarily a poetry of nouns and secondarily of adjectives; verbs are relegated to a subordinate function. Linked to this is the relative lack of deictic words that indicate the situational co-ordinates of person (I, you, us, them), place (here, there, this, that), and time (now, then, yesterday, today). By not providing these, the effect is imagistic and often that of timelessness. In "Vinland", the seamen are lost in "salt monotony" and Brown's use of language is suited to the situation:

> Wet shirt, breeches, kamiks
> For a week
> And a loud cough.
> No blink of fire still
> On the bleak
> Unbroken circles of sea,
> No singing throats
> Between ship and shore. [...]
>
> Salt in the mouth,
> The rage
> Of north wind at morning,
> Sodden crust,
> Cold kissings of rain. [...]
>
> Too late for the rudder's turning
> Back into history, [...]
> The prow breaks thin ice
> Into a new time. ("Vinland", *SP*, p. 127 ff.)

[205] See GMB, "The Old Man and his Writing desk", in *The Scotsman*, 12/10/1991.

Another feature of Brown's work, and a subject that Hopkins studied carefully when dealing with Hebrew poetry, is parallelism. Hopkins noticed that the most prominent feature of Hebrew poetry was its insistent parallelism.[206] Drawing attention to the fact that the parallelism that provides the groundplan of Hebrew poetry is an important but often unrecognised element of all versification, he writes:

> Hebrew poetry, [...] is structurally only distinguished from prose by its being paired off in parallelisms, subdivided of course often into lower parallelisms. This is well-known, but the important part played by parallelism of expression in our poetry is not so well-known. At present it will be enough to remember that it is the cause of metaphor, simile, and antithesis, to see that it is anything but unimportant.[207]

Not only does the use of figures of speech and phrases or compounds which repeat constructions give poetry something of a rhetorical feel; it also presents a means of heightening and inscaping language. More clearly, parallelism distinguishes heightened and ceremonial speech from ordinary speech, as in Hopkins' line "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame." Analysing the use and effect of parallelism in biblical poetry Robert Alter points out that the most obvious thing is the parallelism of meaning observed by the poet with what seems almost schematic regularity in the opening line, every component in the first half of the line being precisely echoed in the second half. Like rhyme, regular metre and alliteration, parallelism is a linguistic coupling. It contributes to the special unity and to the memorability of the utterances and creates a sense of an elevated or ritualistic kind of discourse, ultimately rooted in a magical conception of language as potent performance.[208] As to the effect of parallelism, it resists stasis and has the potential to "make strange" (defamiliarise). This principle was formulated by Victor Shklovsky in "Art as Technique":

> The perception of disharmony in a harmonious context is important in parallelism. The purpose of parallelism, like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception – that is, to make a unique semantic modification.[209]

A common feature in this process of "making strange" is the movement from ordinary to poetic terms. This is associated with a developmental pattern (emphatic interlinear parallelism). It is a movement from the colloquial to the abstract, as in: "We grope like blind men a wall// like the eyeless we grope" (Isaiah 59, 9-10). "Blind men" becomes "the eyeless", a kind of kenning or, as Shklovsky would have

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[206] See GMH, *Journals and Papers*, p. 167.

[207] See GMH, "On the Origin of Beauty", *Journals and Papers*, p. 106.

[208] See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York 1985), p. 7.

[209] See Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique", quoted in L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln 1965), p. 21.

put it, a de-familiarisation that calls our attention to its essential meaning.[210] Again and again, the biblical poets introduce a common noun in the first verset and match it with a kind of explanatory epitaph – or, more interesting, a metaphorical substitution – in the second verset as in: "Gird yourself and keen, you priest,/ wail, you ministers of the altar".[211] This involves a movement from the prosaic to the poetic, or from the literal to the figurative and is a recurrent heightening device of biblical poetry, such as the kenning is in skaldic verse. That Brown admired Hebrew poetry is instanced in his appreciative comments on biblical language and poetry. However, his own work too demonstrates that he embraced the possibilities given by parallelism when he moves from the abstract (kenning) to the literal (specification): "the lord of the bog, the kestrel/ Paced round the sun" ("Peat Cutting"); "Another robber of barrows slouched, the kestrel" ("Ikey Crosses the Ward Hill to the Spanish Wreck"); "Tammag [...] saw blue surging hills, the whales" ("Ploughman and Whales"); "The true earth-food, beef and barley scone" ("Haddock Fishermen"); "The wolf-man, trapper/ Saw their prints" (*Forresterhill*); or when he reverses it and moves from the prosaic to the poetic, from the literal to the figurative, as in "A gold coin, drop of sunsweat" (*Forresterhill*); "There is a cow, a lady of butter" ("Love Letter");

A common form of parallelism in biblical poetry, as indeed in Brown's, is hidden repetition. This is the common manoeuvre of ellipsis in which a word in the first verset, usually a verb governs the parallel clause in the second verset as well (a verb does double duty). What is accomplished through this kind of ellipsis is (in the line where the verb is missing) a freeing of space (through the absence of a rhythmic unit) which can then be used to elaborate or sharpen meaning, or isolate the following object or noun phrase for attention. It stresses the noun and at the same time opens room for elaboration or contemplation. When using ellipsis as a form of syntactic compression Brown leaves an area of suggestion and silence between words and phrases:

> The wolf-man, trapper
> Saw their prints
> And fire marks in twenty places in the forest
> And a trail of blood. (*Forresterhill*, *SP*, p. 153)

Or in "We put bandages on his feet,/ A crust in his bowl" (ibid., p. 157); "Look for no company of goodly folk/ No fellow pilgrims on that road" (ibid., p. 161); "After the thunder, sun" ("Brodgar Poems", *SP*, p. 169); "The Sound today a burning sapphire bough" ("December Day, Hoy Sound", *LaF*, p. 14); "Heart sick of the land"

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[210] See Alter, p. 14.

[211] See Joel, 1:5 and 13, quoted in Alter, p. 15.

("Thorfinn", *LaF*, p. 15). Nouns are emphasised and verbs are omitted; the result is syntactic compression and intensification of situation or mood.

The repetition of sounds in alliteration and rhyme is another form of a parallel construction which Brown used to heightening his language. He repeated words in order to deepen their emotional effects and to set up echoes or cause a pause or silence. He also used it to colour in and focus: "The seamen stopped their lading. Poets are/ welcome,/ They remind men of the great circle of silence./ Where the saga sails forever". ("Greenpeace", *WoA*, p. 52); "Saws shrieked, sputtered, were sharpened, sang" ("Building the Ship", *FwP*, p. 3); alliterative patterning as in Anglo-Saxon, Old-English and Icelandic can also be seen in lines such as "fine flowers of flame" ("Voyager", *SP*, p. 121); or in "Twelfth Century Norse Lyrics..." where the predominant "s"-sounds create the impression of echoing the sound of water as well as the words and whispers of the Mass:

> Out of the dragon sea, a seeking
> Into the lucencies of Christ.
> (Salt furrows we make [...])
> Sin darkens the grain-hold.
> We have branded their coasts with rage and lust, [...]
> No end of sorrow, soultroth, seeking, still.
> *Kyrie, Christe, Kyrie eleison* ("A Mass at Sea", *SP*, p. 90)

Brown was also fascinated by runes (from Old Norse "secret"). Each runic character was believed to have a magical significance. Traditionally associated with incantation and magical practice, the word rune itself meant "whisper" or "mystery". Brown himself was familiar with this: "What is a poem or a carving on a stone? It was, originally, a spell to make the corn grow, to lure fish into the net; beauty and utility were one".[212] In "A Work for Poets" (*FaL*, p. 86.), he identifies the work of a poet as the carving of runes, and in "Lux Perpetua" he celebrates the rune as something whereby people seek the divine and holy: "by such glimmers we seek you" (p. 34).

Moreover, Brown made use of the poetic vigour of liturgy drawing on a language created by generations of worship, writing, reading and reflection. Versions of prayers consisting of long sequences of chanted supplications associated with rituals that re-enact a tribal charter and re-affirm a communal identity are frequently woven into Brown's language.[213] The language of the psalms (originally songs or chants sung to a harp) was also attractive for Brown. Considered as a high and appropriate form of worship, the psalms in the Old Testament explore the effects of a divinity on the mind of man. Robert Alter points out that as the form of psalms was

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[212] See GMB, in *Portrait of Orkney* (London 1988), p. 48.

[213] See "A Jar of Salt" (*FwP*, p. 17), "The Statue in the Hills" (*FwP*, pp. 18-21), "Peat Cutting" (*SP*, p. 57), "Our Lady of the Waves" (*SP*, p. 37 ff.), also "Funeral" (*FwP*, p. 53).

adopted, Hebrew poetry became an instrument for expressing in a collective voice a distinctive sense of time, space, history, creation, and the character of individual destiny.[214] Brown adopts psalm-like forms in his Norse versions of Christianity and Christ's sacrifice to yield a picture of the world that integrates more primitive and sometimes pagan and pantheistic elements of belief. In "Song of the Monks" (*Vinland*, p. 232) he attempted to evoke their spiritual vision and frame of mind when he presents their prayer for a dead fisherman:

> Christ of the workbench, by thy strength and timberwit in the
> long, powerful keel.
> Be thou in the well-made strakes.
> Be thou in the tall mast.
> Be thou in the thwarts and rowlocks. [...]
> Be thou in the bread and wine of the seamen, hidden in the sea chest.
> Be thou, Lord, at the helm, when at last the voyager turns his face
> to the west... (*Vinland*, p. 232.)

A further dimension in the ritualising of experience occurs in his recourse to numbers and calendar devices. Brown's use of the number seven is a way of praising and celebrating life. He acknowledges that this number is a

> mysterious and beautiful number in itself, and it occurs often in nature and in ceremony: the colours of the spectrum, the continents, the days of the week (the seven-syllabled Word of Creation), the deadly sins and the cardinal virtues, the ages of man, the family [...]; the five loaves and two fishes of the miracle, the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. [215]

By imposing this symbolism on the structure of a poem or story, he tried to impose a "pattern on the endless flux" or in Hopkins' terms, he inscaped and gave form to his work of art by instressing the mystery of the number seven. Trying to hold the poem in the mystery of this number, Brown creates a quasi-ceremonial atmosphere. Thus his art becomes celebration, and the medieval number symbolism is more than just a decorative or fanciful technique. Rather, Brown drew on medieval philosophy and its claims that the number seven signifies universality because the life of man resolves through seven days, because of the seven gifts of the holy Spirit, because there are seven churches, the seven words of Christ on the Cross. Correspondingly, in "The Seven Poets" he attempted to create a universal portrait of the poet.[216] What is more, Brown's use of the number seven is paradigmatic of his search for and celebration of wholeness, since four (body) plus three (soul) make up the unity of being. Seven is

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[214] See Alter, p. 114. He also points out that "The psalms, more than any other group of biblical poems, brings to the fore the consciousness of the linguistic medium of religious experience and the belief that God exists before and beyond language and can only be mediated to others through the mediation of language" (p. 135).

[215] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 168-169.

[216] See GMB, "The Seven Poets", in *The Sun's Net*, pp. 257-268; Answering a questionnaire by D. J. Jones, Brown pointed out that "Every genuine poet is all of those poets (except the Swedish one)", in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 2029/9/1, 1-9.

the mystery in which all separation, all paradox, (the "body-spirit dichotomy" as Brown calls it in *Magnus*) is symbolically overcome. It is a number that, in the last analysis points to Christ. However, Brown was aware that the poet cannot hope to grasp and hold a totality himself. He knew that the artist's task is to impose a pattern and arrive, at best, at a vision that eternalises the whole in a momentary revelation:

> It is obviously impossible to hope to grasp and hold a totality; art imposes a pattern on the endless flux. My particular pattern is the heptahedron.
>
> I have relied often on the seven-faceted poem or story.[217]

Through the use of the heptahedron as an inscaping and patterning force, Brown attempted to return the poet's word – which is a fallen and "broken" word, a reminder that Eden and a pure Adamic language are no longer available – to Christ, where everything (the word, art, the lesser arts) can be made whole and is held in a totality.

Further related to Hopkins' influence on Brown's language and aesthetic and also perhaps to the personal affinity Brown felt for Hopkins is a poetic tradition within which Hopkins worked. It is an affinity that is basically bardic (Celtic) or skaldic (Norse)[218] and fits in with Brown's Orcadian and Scandinavian literary background. Hopkins found elements in classical Welsh poetry (with its traditional respect for form and music) that go beyond the chiming of consonants, such as the omission of pronouns and relatives, the wide use of compounds, inversion of word order and exclamations that interrupt sentences. All these help to give the concentration that is integral to classical Welsh poetry as well as Hopkins' own work. What Welsh poetry was to Hopkins, Norse literature was to Brown: In both, there is the demand for complex and intricate forms of compactness and precision. Brown was fascinated by the bard's concern for the spoken quality of his language, the discipline of his versification and the use of his poems within the community. Part of the bardic inheritance was a sense that poetry was ultimately functional and that the poet had a particular duty to his public. The dynamics of the bardic voice is the dynamics of a man speaking out loud. The style rarely displays the deliberations and the hesitations of a mind thinking. Instead, it encourages the reader to see the poem as a present speech-act. That sort of speaking presence can be found in the poetry of Hopkins and Brown. There are moments where they treat the poem as a spontaneous

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[217] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 169.

[218] In many modernist studies using the adjective bardic, the term has not always been precise or useful. With "bardic" I do not mean an archaic or nostalgic style or a poetic that disregards the claims of the present time for the allure of the past. Rather I look at the bardic tradition as a set of conventions, technical principles, thematic projects and ambitions that are not rigidly connected to its origins in the history of literature (medieval Celtic poetry); I look at it as a dynamic or voice that is essentially timeless.

utterance or as a poem or story in the process of being told or sung, and the reader is treated as someone who is waiting to be caught up in the event as in Hopkins' "Felix Randal the farrier, O is he dead then? my duty all ended" (poem no. 53); or as in Brown where the poet introduces himself before he starts with the account of his travels: "I, Arnor, the red poet, made/ Four voyages out of Orkney [...]" ("The Five Voyages of Arnor", *SP*, p. 35); In "Bird in the lighted hall" Brown evokes the immediacy and the musical and bardic origins of the poem: "The old poet to his lute:" (*SP*, p. 117); in "A Warped Boat" too, the oral nature of the poem or story is emphasised: "As one would say, lighting an evening pipe/ At a banked fire," (*FwP*, p. 47). But there is much more going on in these poems than simply "speaking out loud". Bardic poetry is vocative and addresses the reader.[219] Frequently it is the performance of speech in some formal or contrived way that serves as the model for bardic poetry: its tones and rhythms are those of sermons, oratory, chants, debates, prayers, declarations, arguments and oracles. The language of the bardic voice is slightly more elevated, oratory, ritualistic or ceremonial than ordinary speech. It is heightened speech coloured by the impersonal stance. In bardic poetry, which comes close to a kind of spoken ritual, the poet presents himself as a representative of all men, or at least of his community or country. He articulates the public's thoughts. Thus, because the poet is not just speaking about his own limited understandings, speech in this kind of poetry is usually confident and resonant and it reflects Brown's own definition of ceremonial speech as "the language not of one man only but the language of a whole people". The poet sets himself up as the medium for new perceptions, or for what he would describe as new information or the truth. His work forms an epiphany and often has a prophetic or visionary character.

The concern for the resonant character of the bardic voice shows that such a poetry was not meant for private meditation or personal communication. The bardic presence signals a poetry that is primarily concerned with the effect it has on an audience. A poem is supposed to perform a communal function. Other genres, such as riddles, charms, prayers and prophecies are also written for, and on behalf of, an audience. They are forms that facilitate the communication between a people and its deity and they are charged with the need to be both enigmatic and representative. The bard's work was considered as a kind of service. His poems were written to

[219] Note Brown's use of apostrophe in "The Poet" ("Therefore, he..."), or in "The Storm" ("So, blinded with love...") In so doing he is pretending that he is continuing some kind of discourse that has started earlier with a "real" audience. As a means of textual cohesion and bringing poetry alive or taking it back to its orally inspired roots, it gives the readers the feeling that they are part of the action and that they already know some of the background to which the poet refers. Thus, the conjunction "so", or "therefore" is unusually placed in the opening line of the poem implying a causal relationship with something that has gone before.

accompany and enhance actual occasions and events. What is more, his language was expected to have real consequences on the event. A newborn baby was blessed so that it may have a healthy and happy life, enemies were cursed so that the battle could be won, poems were made to guarantee a good harvest etc. Looking at some of Hopkins' and Brown's titles shows their concern with the social and functional aspects of their art: "The Bugler's First Communion", "At the Wedding March", "The Loss of the Eurydice", "In honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez" (Hopkins); and "The Five Voyages of Arnor", "Runes from a Holy Island", "Runes from the Island of Horses", "Crofter's Death", "Vikings, two harp songs", "Elegy", "The Death of Peter Esson", "A Carol for Kenna", "The Wreck of the Archangel", "In Memoriam I. K", "Four poems for Edwin Muir", "Homage to Burns", "A Work for Poets", "The Funeral of Ally Flett", "Shipwreck", "The Sea: Four Elegies", "Vikings: three harp-songs: Bjorn the Shetlander sails to Largs 1263", "The New Skipper", "The Battle in Ulster"; "Homage to Heddle" (Brown).

Whatever the importance of the social and functional quality of bardic poetry, or the bardic "voice", it does not operate alone. Sheila Deane points out that bardic poetry sets the energies of the voice against an equally forceful poetic design. It is identified by the tension between the two forces of voice and device. Dean holds that although a relationship between speech and form exists in all poetry, the bardic endeavour is to combine the most passionate speech with the most intricate limitations: "The voice tries for the fullest expression possible and the form tries for the utmost restriction."[220] As a model for this tension Dean offers Celtic art. She explains that in Celtic art

> one line is allowed to wander, wind, zigzag, branch out, return on itself, and completely fill the space allotted. The other line offers a firm and unwavering delineation of that space. The intense variability of one line balanced by the equally intense rigidity of the other line provides Celtic art with its characteristic shape.[221]

This shape is also apparent in medieval Celtic poetry and can be detected in the ornamental nature of the highly stylised Norse wood and stone carvings (runes). Indeed, some critics and poets believe that this shape is not limited to the work of medieval poets and artists but that it underlies all Celtic or Scandinavian productions. The poet and artist David Jones, for instance, saw some of these traits held in common by both medieval and modern writers. To him, the shape of Celtic or Scandinavian art was always complex, de-centred and enclosed, a way of getting "the entirety or totality in a little place or space":

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[220] See Sheila Deane, *Bardic Style in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas* (Michigan 1989), p. 5.
[221] Ibid., pp. 5-6

> Those of us who are within, or have some affinity with, or in some way are influenced by the "Celtic" thing know only that for us a great complexity & interweaving, a sort of meandering (but by no means an aimless meandering), strongly rhythmic but flexible, in which every peripheral part is just as essential as the more central parts, come in to our way of getting the "wholeness". [222]

That the Celtic or indeed the Scandinavian "thing" is an important force in Hopkins' and Brown's work is indicated by the terms with which they themselves describe their craftsmanship. Deane interprets Hopkins' terms Instress and Inscape as corresponding to the functions of the wandering line and the enclosing line, instress being the dynamic potential or inner pressure that gives a thing its characteristic energy; Inscape being the essential code of a thing's being, the laws and principles that give each thing is characteristic shape. "Instress", she concludes "is a matter of excitement and vitality while Inscape is a matter of form and control".[223] In a similar way, Brown's work thrives on the creative tension between "the delight [...] in decoration" and "pure shape"[224], which corresponds to the wandering and enclosing line. Moreover, the wandering line relates to the dynamic that Brown calls "the endless flux", the dynamic potential or inner pressure from which he creates a momentary place of vision and contemplation, "a place of order" by imposing a pattern, by trying to enclose it, inscape it, catch a character, situation, episode, rhythm or flavour and hold it in the mystery of the poem's shape or Inscape; then, as Brown points out, "there it is imprisoned till the song or fable is finished and it is free to go, like Ariel". [225]

The bardic stance Brown assumed was a response to his recognition that the modern world is destroying itself. He felt that the poet had to offer himself to be the custodian of value for his society. However, as a modern poet he was perfectly aware that he did this without the endorsement of his people and that this could make him appear anachronistic or otherworldly.[226] "To a Hamnavoe Poet of 2093" is a comment on his concern for the past and the beginnings:

> I hoard, before time's waste
> Old country images: plough-horse,
> Skylark, grass-growth,
> Corn-surge, dewfall, anvil; [...]

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[222] See David Jones, *Letters to a Friend*, p. 89; quoted in Deane, p. 6.

[223] See Deane, p. 6.

[224] See *For the Islands I sing*, p. 65.

[225] Ibid., p. 169

[226] See "The Condemned Well" where it is questioned whether poetry is effective and whether the poet, celebrating the history of "the well on the brae", can actually preserve memories and images of the past: "Fool, thou poet, thou rememberest/ Ada and Mary and Ann/ [...] /Poet, those were beautiful girls/ Nor could thy net of words hold one"; certainly he cannot stop progress: "Fool, thou poet,/ Tomorrow is the day of the long lead pipe." (*YoW*, p. 35). Also, in "The Poet", the poet is depicted as an outsider, a "blind lyrical tramp" who "invaded" the fair.

So, image maimed more and more
On the grid of numbers
Folk must not forget
The marks on the rock. ("To a Hamnavoe Poet...", *FaL*, pp. 13-14)

In the modern poet's hands the bardic, (as indeed the priestly and prophetic) is a celebration as well as a warning; a way of calling attention to the great emptiness that could lie ahead if people forget to value the frail, noble, and holy things, life's "pure sources". Deane concludes that "what the bardic material in modern hands, or modern material in bardic hands demonstrates is that literature has been concerned for what gets lost to the extent that it has created a tradition of loss, and that tradition has lasted."[227] The contribution that Brown made to this tradition is significant, both to the bardic and the sacramental tradition as well as his personal search for a centre that can hold. Though the bardic may be regarded as only one voice among many, it sustained his approach and his attempts to de-familiarise and refresh our perception. In many ways, the process of exploring the bardic as well as other related voices and stances, helped him to absorb these elements while moving his poetry into a field of its own.

Another, perhaps *the* most striking element of Brown's work is his use of riddles and kennings. As an admirer of the art of the Norse skalds and sagamen, Brown was impressed by skaldic devices as they presented further ways of charging language with meaning and of re-alerting the reader to the capacity of words. Riddles and kennings contribute to the re-freshening of the reader's perception because they force the reader to adjust his perceptual categories. Riddles are essentially comparisons, based on the description of one thing in terms of another thing. They are metaphors with one term concealed and are based on a strong sense of picture. Moreover, the riddle asks a question: "What is the name of ...?" thereby triggering or encouraging a way of knowing something. Involving condensation rather than elaboration, it is a naming that creates space rather than reducing it:

What's winter? A thousand stars,
Shrinkings of snow, an empty pail. ("Eynhallow: ...", *SP*, p. 94)

or in "Our Lady of the Waves":

In between, what is man?
A head bent over fish and bread and ale.
Outside, the long furrow.
Through a door, a board with a shape on it. ("Our Lady of the Waves", *YoW*, p. 21.)

The kenning tightens the elements of a riddle into a figure of traditional formulaic diction: it presents a riddle in miniature. It is a name for an object based on a way of

[227] See S. Deane, p. 236.

knowing it. In the kenning, an habitual or faded term or name is avoided in favour of a circumlocation exhibiting the object in a new light. In "The Sea: Four Elegies" Brown probes words in order to get to their "ghost" and "kernel", their experiential, sensuous and functional root:

> The word "sea" is small and easily uttered.
> They utter it lightly who know least about it.
> A vast ancient terror is locked in the name.
> Like energy in an atom. [...]
> The sea is the Great Sweet Mother.
> She is the Swan's Path.
> She is the Whale's Acre.
> She is the Garden of White Roses.
> She is the Keeper of Horses.[...]
> She is the Giver of Salt and Pearls. ("The Sea: Four Elegies", *W*, p. 30)

In a kenning a riddle is transformed from the interrogative into the declarative: What is a whale's acre? – The sea. It is a substitution for the literal term and is an instrument for the forceful development of meaning. The effect, in any event, is to de-familiarise and to offer a new way of perception. Brown is very alert to such chances given by the kenning. In "Stations of the Cross: Nine Variations", in the eighth poem "Creator", Brown uses the kenning in an idiosyncratic way by composing a litany which combines kenning elements with biblically-derived liturgical address:

> He is the Pitcher at the fountain.
> He is the Winter Tree dragged by a peasant.
> He is the Flax and Wheel and fold of linen.("Stations of the Cross...", *W*, p. 54.)

In "Hill Runes" he describes the tractor as a "petrol drinker"; lobsters are depicted as "the purple samurai of the flood" ("Thorfinn", *LaF*, p. 15), a cow as a "lady of butter" ("Love Letter", *SP*, p. 61); whales as "blue fish" ("Shipwreck", *YoW*, p. 11) or "blue surging hills" ("Ploughman and Whales", *FwP*, p. 54), whisky as "broken corn"("Shipwreck") and candy-floss as "sweet fog" ("Hamnavoe Market", *YoW*, p. 29); harvest too is paraphrased in terms of what it looks like or what purpose or effect it has on the perceiving mind: "cargoes of summer" ("Jock", *FwP*, p. 51). Other examples of Brown's own versions of kennings include: "ship-wit", "sea-care" ("The Star to every Wandering Barque", *SP*, p. 131); "eye-salt" ("Tea Poems", *SP*, p. 82), or "earth-food", ("Haddock Fishermen", *SP*, p. 62.) Words are linked to the way they make an impression on the senses or in terms of what they evoke, what associations they provoke in the perceiver's mind and what is felt to be inherent in their very nature. Most importantly however, the kenning allows Brown to experiment with the Inscape, the "inner scape [...] the sweep and range and mind and

spirit" of things and people.[228] Though simple kennings occur in every literature, the skaldic practice goes even further in allowing substitution for both basic word and qualifying noun. Another effect is achieved by the interchange of conceptions, as when the sea is designated as the land, or the land as the sea. Brown demonstrates this practice when he calls the sea "acre of whales" or the "Garden of White Roses", when he combines words from different semantic fields as in "sea-plough", "fish-plough", ("Sea Rune", *SP*, p. 65), and when he ignores selectional restrictions or semantic categories as in: "The corn breaks, wave after wave" ("Jock", *FwP*, p. 51), "the boats drove furrows homeward" ("Hamnavoe", *LaF*, p. 23), "corn tides" ("Daffodils", *LaF*, p. 46), "harvests of fish and corn" ("The Wreck of the Archangel", *WoA*, p. 2). Frequently the kenning is given splendour and fullness by the use of adjectival elements in the following noun-periphrasis: "salt-scarred" sailor (*Forresterhill*, *SP*, p. 154); "sea-insulted", "flame-bearded Audun" ("Twelfth Century Norse Lyrics of Rognvald Kolson", *SP*, p. 88 ff.), "candle draught-flung" ("Seal Island Anthology", *SP*, p. 110), "gold-ringed hands" (ibid., p. 108).

Brown's fascination with the skaldic elaboration on kennings and riddles matches the Symbolist and Modernist interest in the sensuous and experiential nature inherent in words, as it was employed by Eliot, Yeats and other modern writers and poets. The Symbolists held that there is some inner reality to the world, of which the things that we perceive are merely symbols to which poetry enables us to penetrate. The poet, in looking at the external world searches for a combination of objects which will correspond to some inner state of feeling and experience; this is his interest in the outer world. Mallarmé held:

> To name an object outright is to destroy three-quarters of the enjoyment of a poem, which depends on a gradual process of guessing; to *suggest*, that is the ideal. [...] evoking an object little by little in order to show forth a state of the soul.[229]

Brown's use of periphrasis and circumlocation (illustrated in the following lyrical and also humorous phrases), suggests that he embraced this attitude. Death is depicted in the following

> Peter, I mourned. Early on Monday last
> There came a wave and stood above your mast. ("The Death of Peter Esson", *LaF*, p. 12)

Or

> The old go, one by one, like guttered flames. [...]
> Tammag the bee-man has taken his cold blank mask
> The honeycomb under the hill,
> Corston who ploughed out the moor
> Unyoked and gone; ("The Year of the Whale", *YoW*, p. 25)

[228] See GMB's definition of Inscape in *For the Islands I sing*, p. 157.
[229] See P. N. Furbank and Arnold Kettle, *Modernism and its Origins* (Milton Keynes 1975), p. 15.

Or

> the blackbird
> Laid by his little flute for the last time ("The Hawk", *YoW*, p. 33)

Elsewhere, Brown used this approach of presenting situations, states of mind and things he saw in terms of what they evoke or what they look, feel, smell or taste like, thereby only gradually disclosing their meanings: cornstalks are described as "risers from the dead" ("Elegy", *LaF*, p. 40), a black eye as "an eye loaded with thunder" ("Hamnavoe Market", *YoW*, p. 29); drinking and hangover are circumscribed thus:

> Johnston stood beside the barrel.
> All day he stood there.
> He woke in a ditch, his mouth full of ashes.("Hamnavoe Market", *YoW*, p. 29)

No doubt, Brown's use of kenning, circumlocation and periphrasis took much of its vigour from skaldic and Norse practice. However, while D'Arcy rightly points out that the kenning can "capture the very sound and spirit of skaldic poetry", it is doubtful whether the terse cryptic or runic style was adopted by Brown only for "artistic and symbolic effect".[230] While it is true that Norse themes inspired Brown from the start, it was only after internalising Hopkins' concern for the word and his concept of Inscape that he actively employed Norse inspired techniques. The poetic methods he employed from roughly 1971 onwards thrive on the bardic or scaldic and correspond to his wish to weld the "pure style of the sagamen" with the more intricate style of the Celtic ornamental tradition.[231] Perhaps because it appealed to what he described as the Celtic element, the delight in ornamentation,[232] riddle and kenning are used to such an extent in his work. Whatever the reasons, the kind of special periphrasis that the kenning exemplifies was bound to be attractive for Brown since it is expressive of a certain way of perceiving and representing the world and it has the effect of a semantic compression which gives modernist emphasis to his subject matter. His exploration of kenning, rune and riddle allowed him to relate in his way what he had learned from other poets. He rejoiced in the possibilities given by them because they were means of renewing a worn out poetics and re-kindling the "flame of the word". By taking language back to its linguistic roots and by taking our habitual perception back to a more original or even primitive consciousness, Brown played with the physical, analogical and spiritual reach of words. Yet, while taking language and words back to a "place of order" where they recover their "ghosts" and

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[230] See D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 243.

[231] Ted Hughes described Brown's work as "a modelled object, like a brooch of Celtic design"; in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3116.3, BBC radio programme celebrating Brown's 70th birthday in 1991.

[232] In *For the Islands I sing* Brown explains that from his mother's side, the Celtic, he delights too in decoration, although he had learned from the sagas the importance of "pure shape", see p. 65.

"kernels", he succeeded in bringing it close to the artistic demands of modern poetry and criticism in which the concept of the "play" and the language-game is an important feature. His approach to de-familiarising his reader's perception and presenting words in a new and fresh manner was energised by his idiosyncratic use of skaldic techniques and his welding together of modern and ancient rhetorical devices, voices and styles. Kenning, periphrasis and other figures of speech were basic to his idea of the "play" and his attempt to realise Inscape. By withholding and releasing the meanings of words, or indeed having his readers uncover them, Brown encouraged a fresh, imaginative and sensory approach to language, making his poetry pose a challenge for those who are willing to enter his "fold" of words.[233]

[233] About the idea of the "play" and the language of the kenning see T. Krömmelbein, *Skaldische Metaphorik. Studien zur Funktion der Kenningsprache in skaldischen Dichtungen des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts* (Kirchzarten 1983). For more on the Scandinavian influence on Brown's style see D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, McGrath, "Brown's Orkney Tapestry", and R. Murray, "The influence of Norse Literature on the Twentieth-century writer GMB", in M. Mahlzahn (ed.), *Aspects of Identity: the Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-1981) as National Self-Expression* (Frankfurt a. Main 1984), pp. 547-557. A comprehensive account of the skaldic influences on Brown's language and poetry (especially after 1971) is still missing. As to Brown's narrative economy and terseness of style G. Roberts has pointed out that it is a widely recognised feature of folk literature to use repetition, patterning, triadic structures and framing devices. See Graeme Roberts, "Tradition and Pattern in the short stories of George Mackay Brown" in D. Hewitt and M. Spiller (eds.), *The Literature of the North* (Aberdeen 1983), pp. 176-188.

Chapter IV

The Quest for the Whole – George Mackay Brown and Thomas Mann

1. Introduction

George Mackay Brown is not unique in his sacramental and symbolic view of the world, time and the past. He explored what some of his poetic mentors such as Edwin Muir and Gerard Manley Hopkins have called "The Eden", or "Immortal Diamond". Muir's distinction of the Story and the Fable was taken further by Brown's insights into Hopkins' sacramental vision and by his own view of Catholicism which he saw as epitomising other cosmological interpretations and pagan versions or "foreshadowings" of the sacred sacrifice. What Brown had learned from other writers and their works was given power by his synthesising mind, his interest in patterns and inscapes as well as his fascination with ritual and ceremony as perennial forms and expressions of human experience and faith. Thus, his "journey back" – essentially a spiritual quest for the patterns, roots and the "pure sources" of life, art and religion – was a process of identifying with and absorbing other writers' works and traditions and helped him define his own approach to art and literature.

Apart from Muir's and Hopkins' influence, the process of exploring those traditions that suited his interests as well as developing his own talent and potential made him look to both ancient and modern sources such as the Sagas, Norse poetry, the Border Ballads, biblical literature, Japanese haiku, the British poets and writers of the '50s and '60s, as well as to forms and ideas inspired by different movements and artists of twentieth-century modernism and the Scottish Renaissance. However, in addition to the mainly British and Scandinavian sources or the specifically Orcadian roots of his work – subjects that have preoccupied critics and scholars for some time – there are other literary stimuli that inspired Brown. Although the European influences on Brown's work have received very little attention, if any at all, it is a fact that he was familiar with the work of Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann.[1] In a review of Brecht's *Poems 1913-1956*, Brown speaks highly of the German poet:

> Perhaps, when many of the cherished and honoured symbols of our century have faded a little [...] a poet will stand out whose concern was to provide wholesome bread, and to honour the poor and oppressed of the earth: Bertolt Brecht. [...] Brecht allows no dazzling virtuosity, or manipulation of symbols, or wilful obscurity, to come between him and his readers. He

[1] Alan Bold mentions Thomas Mann in *George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh 1978) amongst other writers who have influenced Brown (p. 12). However, nothing is said about the nature of such an influence or the reasons as to why Brown was drawn to Mann.

> addresses them with frankness, passion, scorn, humour. He has the earthiness of Chaucer and Burns, and their larkrise. [...] There is nothing more moving in modern literature than the poems he wrote during the war. These three volumes of Brecht are to be kept for times of worry and depression.[2]

Brown also respected Brecht, the playwright. In his autobiography he asserts that reading Brecht's plays inspired him and gave him further ideas on how to structure his own play, *A Spell for Green Corn*:

> Much later, I was writing a long play called *A Spell for Green Corn*. I was having great difficulty with at least one of the scenes. That play caused me much pain and sweat. The poet Iain Crichton Smith loaned me a book of Brecht's plays. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* entranced me from the first page. Seeing how Brecht had shaped that masterpiece, I saw at once how the "impossible" part of *A Spell for Green Corn* must be shaped. My pen hovered and sang like a bird over the manuscript for a few days.[3]

There is no date attached to this moment of revelation but it can be safely assumed that Brown's encounter with Brecht's work took place in the early and mid-'60s when *A Spell for Green Corn* was being worked on.[4] Although Brown's comments remain fairly general on the nature of Brecht's influence, he was intrigued by his techniques of developing and presenting the plot, his use of non-Aristotelian dramaturgical concepts such as epilogues or titles for individual scenes, as well as his use of singers and narrators to introduce the plot and characters, to push the action forward or to reflect and comment on characters' thoughts. Frequently, Brecht's plots are interrupted and interspersed with songs and music, devices that create the feeling that the action is not closed and that the episodes do not succeed one another indistinguishably as they would in a more traditional dramatic or realist structure which tends to be seamless rather than "knotted"; invisible, rather than visible.[5] A brief look at the structure of Brown's play, *A Spell for Green Corn,* clarifies what he meant when he said that reading Brecht helped him with the "impossible" part of his own play. In *A Spell for Green Corn*, Brown follows the life and the spiritual development of an island community and explores the interrelation of music and art with the people from roughly the twelfth century to the late twentieth century. In keeping with the aims of epic theatre, and with its didactic function, he deals with a

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[2] See GMB, "Poetry for the People", in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 2029/10/3; 18-22.

[3] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 66.

[4] Certainly, Brown was not the only one to discover Brecht. "Epic" style and techniques constituted a strong element in theatrical productions of the period. J. Reinelt has pointed out that "Brecht's dramaturgy was able to [...] become a legacy because the post-war situation in Britain was hospitable to, or compatible with, epic theatre practices." (Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was first performed in England in 1956 and again in 1965) See introduction to J. Reinelt, *After Brecht, British Epic Theatre* (Michigan 1994).

[5] For a description of the craft of epic writing see Brecht's definition in "A Short Organum" in John Willet, *Brecht on Theatre* (New York 1964), p. 201.

large span of time and attempts to show historic and psychological structures and patterns of thought and belief as well as the behaviour of people in a changing social and religious climate. Brown uses scene-titles and comments to indicate the passing of time such as the change from episode one, the "age of saints and fish and miracles" to episode two, "Many generations later – the 17th century – a time of witches and ploughs and kirk sessions". The task, however, of bridging the gap between the stages of hunting or fishing and farming in episode one and two, was a problem for Brown and he solved it by using a Brechtian device, incorporating the *Ballad of John Barleycorn*. The ballad is sung by the poet (who makes his first appearance with this song as a prototype of the musician, Storm Kolson, a figure that symbolises all artists, poets and musicians). Apart from introducing this symbolic character the scene is crucial for a further reason. Inspired by Brecht, Brown used the song or ballad as the bridge from fisherman to farmer; it marks an important transformation in the situation of the people and it pushes the plot forward by suggesting a next stage in time and a change in material and spiritual culture: the seventeenth century.

Thomas Mann is another German writer whom, as poet Ian Crichton Smith recalls, Brown was "very fond of".[6] Given Brown's interest in German literature, especially his fascination with Brecht and Thomas Mann, one might again legitimately speculate that Brown's close contact with Edwin Muir could have encouraged him to explore European, and German literature in particular. Muir, who has been called a "European Poet", travelled extensively in Europe and knew German.[7] From the 1920s onwards he worked as a translator of German and Austrian literature and his subsequent criticism of German writing not only indicated "a substantial involvement with German culture", as Howard Gaskill has pointed out, but it also helped to establish him as an important mediator of German literature to the English-speaking world.[8] When Brown went to Newbattle, Muir had already reviewed some of Mann's works; he reviewed Mann's *The Tales of Jacob*, the first part of the *Joseph*-tetralogy, for *The Listener* on 13 June, 1934. In 1940, he reviewed Mann's *Lotte in Weimar*,[9] as well as *Buddenbrooks* and *The Last years: A Memoir of*

[6] See personal correspondence with Ian Crichton Smith (21/1/1997). When asked whether he acted as a mediator of Brecht to Brown, having lent him a book of Brecht's plays, Crichton Smith did not recall the incident. However, he remembered that Brown "was very fond of" Thomas Mann.

[7] See Ritchie Robertson, "Edwin Muir as European Poet", in C. J. M MacLachlan and D. S. Robb (eds.), *Edwin Muir. Centenary Assessments*, Association for Scottish Literary Studies (Aberdeen 1990), pp. 102-118.

[8] See Howard Gaskill, "Edwin Muir – The German Aspect", in *Lines Review* 69 (June 1979), p.14.

[9] See *The Listener* (28/11/1940).

My Father by Erika Mann in 1958.[10] He was also familiar with Mann's "Tonio Kröger", *The Magic Mountain*, *Doctor Faustus* and *Death in Venice*.[11] It is unlikely that Muir's marked bias towards German literature escaped Brown when he came across *The Story and the Fable* in the mid-'40s, when he began to read more widely in Muir and when he read his critical works. Yet, Brown insists that his first experience of Thomas Mann was a piece of pure serendipity:

> One afternoon, in the Stromness bookshop, I took from the shelf the Everyman edition of *Selected Stories* by Thomas Mann. I think I must have bought it because there was nothing else to read, on that particular day.[12]

Whether Muir had any direct responsibility for Brown's interest in Mann is not entirely clear; yet it is striking that Brown should have begun to explore German literature at precisely the time when he was familiarising himself with Muir's writing and criticism.[13] However, Muir had reservations about Mann. Brown recalls that he was not one of the "first admirers" of Thomas Mann and that he found *The Holy Sinner* (the translation was published in 1952 when Brown was at Newbattle) distasteful:

> My favourite novelists at the time were E. M. Forster and Thomas Mann. About Thomas Mann he had reservations, though he admired much about him. Mann's novel *The Holy Sinner* came out while we were at Newbattle. Edwin was sent a review copy by some magazine, he didn't much like it; the double incest theme he found distasteful. He presented me with the book, inscribed "To George, first admirer of Thomas Mann, from Edwin Muir, second or third admirer of that Great One".[14]

Irrespective of how specific Muir's influence on Brown was with regard to German literature in general and Mann in particular, Thomas Mann's work made a deep impression on Brown who himself pointed out that Mann was one of the few writers that had influenced his art "in any deep way".[15] After reading Mann's *Selected Stories* and being highly impressed by them, he sent for *The Magic Mountain* which gave him "days of intense delight".[16] In an interview with Bob Tait and Isobel Murray in 1984, where he reveals more about his literary influences and preferences, Brown confirms that his first encounter with Thomas Mann's work occurred in the mid to

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[10] See *The New Statesmen* (18/4/1958).

[11] Muir mentions these works in his article on *Buddenbrooks* in P. H. Butter (ed.), *The Truth of Imagination. Some uncollected reviews and essays by Edwin Muir* (London 1987), pp. 199-202; see also P. H. Butter (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Edwin Muir* (London 1974), p. 38.

[12] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 65.

[13] After Brown had left Newbattle, Muir still encouraged his reading of European literature. He sent him a translation of Hofmannstal's poems and Alan Fournier's *The Grand Meaulnes*, "an interesting book which I think would be completely in your world. I love it." See Edwin Muir's letter to GMB, 13/5/1953, in EULIB, Spec. Col.

[14] See GMB, Essay on Muir, MS (4/2/1966), in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1777.

[15] See GMB, "Writer's Shop", in *Chapman 16* (Summer 1976), p. 22.

[16] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 65.

late 1940s, and that he had read widely in Mann:

> Oh yes, Thomas Mann; I read *The Magic Mountain* in the mid forties and [...] thought it was a wonderful book too, and then of course you read all the other books. One or two let me down. I was bored by one called *Lotte in Weimar*. I couldn't get on with that at all, but all his other books.[17]

He also liked *Doctor Faustus* immensely when it came out in 1949 and read it several times. On various other occasions Brown mentioned Mann as a major influence and commented on his works as belonging to those that he would not like to do without:

> All the thousand books in my house could go, without any lasting regret on my part. I would, however, insist on keeping the works of Thomas Mann, E. M. Forster [...] and Bertolt Brecht.[18]

His admiration for Thomas Mann was long-lasting since much later he admitted:

> As one gets older, fewer and fewer writers have power to cast a spell. Not for years have I experienced the thrill of first opening a book by E. M. Forster, or Thomas Mann [...] Those are moments of a person's life which alter his whole outlook on human affairs.[19]

Brown shared Mann's concern for the human condition and his recognition that modern civilisation was diseased. *The Magic Mountain* appealed to Brown because it supported his own feelings by suggesting that a cure is only possible through the recovery of a corporate sense, a mythical identification with the past and with the beginnings of humanity, which could help yield meaning for modern man. After first reading the novel Brown was very taken with it and he was unstinting in his praise when he wrote to E. W. Marwick:

> About *The Magic Mountain*. Did I say it was the greatest novel that has come out of Europe this century. This is obviously a stupid remark on my part, since I've read only a small fraction of the European novels this century. The only grounds on which I make this claim for *The Magic Mountain*, is personal. I enjoyed the experience of reading it enormously. [...] It is the perfectly straightforward account of seven years spent by a young German in the International Sanatorium at Davos in Switzerland. Of course the novel is full of symbolism: Hans Castorp [...] stands for the youth of the world at the beginning of this century, when science and mechanical invention [...] were advancing with astonishing rapidity. The Sanatorium itself is a microcosm of the modern world, and, just as in the poetry of Eliot, Auden, and Lawrence, it is a world where everyone, even the doctors, are more or less ill. The interesting thing of course is that though all these writers use clinical imagery in their recognition that our civilisation is diseased, they all advance different cures – Eliot Christianity, Auden a kind of Communism, Lawrence the primitive man, and Thomas Mann a return to the simple pastoral communities of the dawn of history. I'm afraid we won't live long enough to see which of them is correct. [...] I can only say that [...] the first reading of *The Magic Mountain* was one of the most satisfactory experiences of my life. [...] The last chapter of the novel, in which Hans Castorp voluntarily leaves the

[17] See Isobel Murray (ed.), *Scottish Writers Talking*, p. 5.
[18] See GMB, *Under Brinkie's Brae*, 15/3/1979.
[19] Ibid., 21/10/1976.

> Sanatorium and marches off to war with the youth of the world, is one of the most moving pieces of literature that I know.[20]

Mann's attitude to religion must also have struck a chord with Brown on further reading. Mann disclaimed any doctrinaire attitude in spiritual matters and felt that it is "only by indirection [...] the parable, the ethical symbolism" that the subject can be approached. In his practice, the "concept becomes secularized, is temporarily divested of its priestly garment and contends itself with the humanly spiritual".[21] Nevertheless, Mann did believe that the artist by his very nature as a "bridge between life and mind", is a religious man whose trait is

> profound and sensitive attention to the will and activities of the universal spirit; to change in the garment of truth; to the just and needful thing; in other words, to the will of God, whom the man of mind and spirit must serve.[22]

By virtue of his care not only for his own product but for the Good, the True, and the will of God, the artist is a religious man. Consequently, Mann's hope for the coming of a new humanity is characterised by his definition of art as transcending the human and pointing to something divine. Because he thinks that artists are essentially religious, Mann's faith in humanism is a religious faith; he hopes that "The new humanity will be universal, and it will have the artist's attitude"[23] – in short, a moral and religious one.

Regardless of how much Brown was aware of Mann's attitude to religion, he certainly shared Mann's humanism and his concern for the future of the human race. In many ways, the impression that Mann's work made on Brown was deep and sustained to the end. Many years after first reading Mann, Brown observed that

> Reading becomes more difficult because there is such a torrent of new books. I tend more and more to read the books and poems that have pleased me through the decades: Tolstoy, [...] Forster, Brecht, Mann, [...] Eliot, Muir [...].[24]

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[20] See GMB, letter to E. W. Marwick (undated, most certainly 1947), in Kirkwall Archive, D 31/30/4.
[21] See Thomas Mann, "What I believe", in *Order of the Day* (New York 1942), pp. 163-164.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 164.
[24] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 181. It is significant that Mann's *Buddenbrooks* belonged to those works that Brown was re-reading not long before his death in April 1996, as Archie Bevan drew to my attention.

2. Modern Literature and "The Ordinary"

> *The discovery of the marvellousness of the ordinary is modern writing's greatest contribution to the sum of literature. (GMB)*[25]

Although the importance for Brown of other British poets and writers, such as T. S. Eliot or Dylan Thomas would certainly be worth investigating, an examination of Thomas Mann's influence is more illuminating in view of Brown's interest in modern European literature and the European context to which he belongs. Therefore I shall turn to Mann for precisely the same reasons as Brown did: Brown responded to Mann's preoccupation with the ordinary and the commonplace or what Harry Levin called the modern "shift from the personal to the epic".[26] Mann was so appealing for Brown because, over the years he reinforced what he had learned from Muir and Hopkins: that the ordinary, "the life of everyone is unique and mysterious".[27] In Brown's opinion the creators of great characters such as Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Mann or Forster, "are more than puppet masters: they have seen that every individual [...] seemingly empty and without meaning – [is] 'diamond, immortal diamond'."[28] Elsewhere he clarifies this:

> Twentieth-century literature has taken up the theme of the ordinary ineffectual man: Joyce's Leopold Bloom, Eliot's Prufrock, Beckett's Estragon and Vladimir, Mann's Hans Castorp, Chekhov's drifters and dreamers on the edge of social catastrophe. It is remarkable that in modern literature it is the common man who holds the rarest treasures. There, lost, is the "immortal diamond".[29]

Although T. S. Eliot is mentioned here alongside Mann, Brown had reservations:

> T. S. Eliot, for all his genius, fails in this respect: human beings for him are always "men and bits of paper, whirled on the cold wind". The union of "the fire and the rose", at the end of *Four Quartets*, is meaningful in religious terms, like the transfiguration of "poor patch, matchwood" into "immortal diamond". But the slow smoulders and cracklings of human life have been bypassed in his work.[30]

The discovery that those "slow smoulders and cracklings of human life", the ordinary and the commonplace can serve as the extraordinary – or in Brown's words, that a writer should try to "make elaborate kennings out of ordinary matters" – was certainly an idea that Brown liked in Thomas Mann. In "The Art of the Novel" ("Die Kunst des Romans") Mann proposed:

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[25] See GMB, *Rockpools and Daffodils*, 29/5/1980.
[26] See Harry Levin, *James Joyce. A Critical Introduction* (London 1944), p. 67.
[27] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 26.
[28] Ibid., p. 175.
[29] Ibid., p. 27.
[30] Ibid., p. 175. Note that this is reminiscent of Muir's comment on Hopkins which Brown, after all, did not seem to share. It is interesting that Brown criticises Eliot for similar reasons.

> The art (of writing) lies in making the smallest possible use of external life in order to bring about the greatest impact on the inner life [...] It is not the task of the novelist to write about great events, but to make small ones interesting [...] Making apparently intrinsically boring things interesting, that is the secret of story-telling.[31]

This affected Brown in a profound way and, over the years, strengthened his belief that "The discovery of the marvellousness of the ordinary is modern writing's greatest contribution to the sum of literature."[32] Elsewhere, he is in tune with Mann when he holds that

> Every man and woman, however seemingly ordinary and unimportant [...] has changed (however minutely) the history of the race. It is those "boring" people who are the heroes of modern literature.[33]

[31] See Thomas Mann, "Die Kunst des Romans" (free translation), in *Gesammelte Werke 10* (Berlin 1960): "Das Geheimnis der Erzählung ist es, das was eigentlich langweilig sein müßte, interessant zu machen" (pp. 356-357).

[32] See GMB, *Rockpools and Daffodils*, 29/5/1980.

[33] See GMB, "An Autobiographical Essay", in M. Lindsay (ed.), *As I remember* (London 1979), p. 9.

3. "The Ocean of Time": The treatment of time and the past

Besides sharing Mann's confidence in the potential of the ordinary person and detail, Brown was also impressed by his treatment of time and the past. The phenomenon of time was of general concern to the Moderns. In *Time and the Novel*, A. A. Mendilow even speaks of the "Time-Obsession of the Twentieth century" and points out that "Never perhaps have our feelings about time changed so radically and assumed such importance in our eyes as in this century".[34] R. J. Quinones who has analysed the modern preoccupation with time explains that for twentieth-century Modernism, as indeed during the Renaissance or during Romanticism, time and history became a point of changing consciousness.[35] As anticipated by Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the first major thinkers to set the pattern for the modernist attitude toward the phenomenon of time, it became the theme of such signposts of modern literature as Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *Four Quartet's* and Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. According to Malcolm Bradbury the phenomenon of time is the one feature that links the different literary movements and writers.[36] About the main modernist works he concludes:

> they tend to be ordered [...] not on the sequence of historical time or the evolving sequence of character, from history or story, as in realism or naturalism, they tend to work spatially or through layers of consciousness.[37]

The focus on the nature of time in so many of the generally accepted major works of modern literature implies a cultural, philosophical and historical context which cannot be expanded on in this study; however, a brief consideration of the treatment of time and the past as a means of undermining or transcending realism and mimesis, in selected works of Mann and Brown, will be revealing. Brown related well to Muir's and Mann's vision of time and temporality; to him too it seemed that "time is not just a sequence of seconds, hours, years, centuries". Moreover, he shared their feeling that "something far more mysterious is working on us and through us".[38] Generally, Brown's treatment of temporality and time is based on a cyclical view of time. He frequently does away with a sequential or chronological view of time or the belief in a linear time-complex.[39] This either makes way for a sacramental view of

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[34] See A. A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (London and New York 1952), p. 3.
[35] See R. J. Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism*, pp. 3-20.
[36] Incidentally, Muir's first major collection of poems, *Variations on a Time Theme* (London 1934), also deals with the phenomenon of time.
[37] See M. Bradbury and J. McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism* (London and New York 1976), p. 50.
[38] See GMB, *Under Brinkie's Brae*, 11/5/1978.
[39] This is particularly well demonstrated in *Magnus*, where history repeats itself. Brown superimposes the figure of the ancient Saint Magnus onto a modern character, suggesting that the sacrifice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was basically the same sacrifice as Magnus' killing. Time becomes redundant since the event, the sacrifice, occurs in timeless space. It is bound to happen again and again, across

time or an essentially mythic "wheel of being", based on a somewhat pagan view of time and history. The cyclical view of time and the belief that history repeats itself does however not give way in Brown to a pessimistic attitude to life or fate, as one might find in Lawrence or Hardy, in many German Expressionist writings and in many of Thomas Mann's visions of decay, decadence and death. Perhaps it was Mann's deeper acquaintance with Nietzsche that had influenced this view since Nietzsche thought of the artist as being ill, weak and decadent by his very nature; in fact, he believed that it is impossible to be an artist and not to be ill.[40] But it was also Mann's coming to terms with the political and cultural situation in Germany and Western Europe which made him express feelings of an oncoming crisis in *The Magic Mountain*, or when he asks:

> Is there not [...] in Western Europe a feeling alive that [...] for all the world there is at hand the ending of an epoch ...?[41]

In Brown's tales too, some of the characters are subject to the same modern fear of an approaching end of the world:

> The time is approaching fast, it is already upon us, the apocalypse, when all the old values are consumed in flames. Literature, music, paintings – all destroyed. The old values go. The old religions. The old philosophies.[42]

Although this parallels Mann's feeling, Brown holds on to a sometimes peculiar mixture of Christian belief in resurrection and a pagan view of life as a "wheel of being whose centre is Incarnation", and he believes that time can be a means of hope and meliorism.[43] In tune with Hopkins' dictum that "there lives the dearest freshness deep down things" and his belief in renewal and continuation, the German commandant Captain Weinacker in *Beside the Ocean of Time* speaks for Brown when he says:

> out of the fires a new world will rise, like the phoenix. A new clean world.[44]

This recalls the last lines of *The Magic Mountain*, where Mann voices his hope for and belief in the survival of the human race after the Great War:

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space and time. By abrupt shifts in chronology and point of view Brown moves the events backwards and forwards in time until they transcend the merely local, to become a universal pattern. What Brown achieves with this is to bring the remote close to the reader; what was strange becomes familiar and what seemed alien and far away is, in fact, shown to be part of ourselves.

[40] Nietzsche held "daß es nicht möglich scheint, Künstler zu sein und nicht krank zu sein." See F. Nietzsche, *Werke*, Taschen-Ausgabe, 10, p. 66; quoted in N. Kakabadse, "Der junge Thomas Mann und Nietzsche", in *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik* 19 no. 2 (1987), p. 123.

[41] See Thomas Mann, "Goethe and Tolstoy", in *Essays of Three Decades* (London 1947), p. 170

[42] See GMB, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, p. 207.

[43] See GMB, "The Eye of the Hurricane", in *A Time to Keep*, p. 181.

[44] See GMB, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, p. 102.

> Moments there were, when out of death, and the rebellion of the flesh, there came to thee, as thou tookest stock of thyself, a dream of love. Out of this universal feast of death [...], fiery glow, may it be that love one day shall mount?[45]

In addition to such similarities and affinities, *The Magic Mountain* is important for yet another reason. The book, commonly regarded as the modern "time-novel" ("Zeitroman"[46]) *per se*, demonstrates Mann's fascination with the time-theme and depicts how the tubercular protagonist Hans Castorp tries to come to terms with the phenomenon of time and of being "lost in time" throughout the novel. The phenomenon, for example, whereby time by virtue of uniformity becomes transformed into space, is the subject of the expository analysis of the chapter "By the ocean of time".[47] In this chapter Mann expresses his concern for the "time-lostness" of Hans Castorp. The emptiness of the bleak, mountainous snowscape appeals to Hans by reminding him of the ocean he knew and loved as a child, but whereas the ocean in *Buddenbrooks* provided a release from temporal existence, here it is threatening by its very lack of measurability. The ocean as well as the mountains become correlative to Castorp's own temporal indifference. Moreover, Mann suggests that routine, tending towards sameness, causes the temporal markers to melt and lose their distinctness. Time seems to pass quickly when many things happen; yet, in the long run, just the reverse occurs. In "Excursus on the sense of time", Mann confronts this problem more directly:

> But what then is the cause of this relaxation, this slowing-down that takes place when one does the same thing for too long at a time: it is not so much physical or mental fatigue or exhaustion, for if that were the case, then complete rest would be the best restorative. It is rather something psychical; it means that the perception of time tends, through periods of unbroken uniformity, to fall away; [...] Many false conceptions are held concerning the nature of tedium. [...] Vacuity, monotony, have, indeed, the property of lingering out the moment and the hour and of making them tiresome. But they are capable of contracting and dissipating the larger, the very large time-units, to the point of reducing them to nothing at all. And conversely, a full and interesting content can put wings to the hour and the day.[48]

The novel, particularly in such passages as the one above, naturally spoke to Brown at a time when he was suffering from another bout of tuberculosis himself; he certainly identified with Castorp's pondering about time and his feeling that time can become the eternal now ("das ewige Jetzt") caught in the image of the "soup-

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[45] See Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (London 1960), p. 716.

[46] Mann used the term in a historical and philosophical sense. In his speech "Einführung in den 'Zauberberg'", he elucidates what he means with the term "Zeitroman": "Er ist ein Zeitroman in doppeltem Sinn: einmal historisch, indem er das Bild einer Epoche [...] zu entwerfen versucht, dann aber, weil die reine Zeit selbst sein Gegenstand ist [...]. Das Buch selbst ist das wovon es erzählt;" See *Gesammelte Werke* 11, pp. 611-612.

[47] Lowe-Porter's translation of the German "Strandspaziergang".

[48] See Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, p. 104.

everlasting" ("Ewigkeitssuppe") when he himself experienced "those sombre moods that gather about a long-term patient".[49] What is more, Brown's own novel, *Beside the Ocean of Time,* shows in many ways that he assimilated *The Magic Mountain* and that he was inspired by the ways in which Mann transcended time and transposed myth and the past (or Muir's Fable) "sub specie temporis nostri". It is significant that the title of Brown's novel directly echoes *The Magic Mountain* chapter "By the Ocean of Time". This suggests that Mann's chapter, and the novel in general struck a chord with Brown. In *Beside the Ocean of Time*, Brown expands upon the idea of the timeless fable that is evoked by following Thorfinn on his journeys through space and time. At the end we come full circle and return to the great ocean of life, "the ocean of the end and the beginning".[50] This accords with the cyclical conception of time shared by Muir and Mann. The way Thorfinn resembles Hans Castorp in his being lost in time and the past is also striking. Castorp's dream-journey back to his roots in the chapter "Snow", and Thorfinn's visionary questings, when being "two thousand years lost in time" spring, so it is suggested, from the same universal source, the great ocean of time. This ocean of eternity stores many mysteries and brings many memories from man's antiquity to its shores: "There are great mysteries to be found on the shore of the great ocean of time."[51]

[49] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 167.
[50] See GMB, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, p. 217.
[51] Ibid., p. 101.

4. The Treatment of Myth and the Quest for Identity and Wholeness

Leben heißt in Spuren gehen (T. Mann) [52]

Thomas Mann's mythic perception of life and his use of myth in the presentation of identity and character also chime with the attitudes towards myth that Brown displays in his works where he re-works old versions of myths and legend as well as (re-) invents new ones. It also provides him with a means of transcending the boundaries of time, the real and the local; in his work too, the use of myth and legend throw light on questions of identity and self in relation to the past.[53]

But what exactly is meant by myth? Admittedly, there exists little agreement about the concept, and definitions are hazardous.[54] Yet, as Ernst Cassirer points out, "we must know what myth is before we can explain how it works".[55] Depending on the school of thought or field of research, different attributes are emphasised in the various definitions of myth. However, there are three ways of defining myth which may be particularly illuminating with respect to Brown and Mann. One is the anthropological approach, which emphasises myth's ritualistic aspects. Northrop Frye characterises myth in terms of ritual: "Myth is the verbal imitation of ritual."[56] Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, regards myth as a depersonalised dream; both, myth and dream are considered to be symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche.[57] Belonging to the same school of thought as Carl Jung, Erich Neumann states that "Myth, being a projection of the transpersonal collective unconscious, depicts transpersonal events."[58] The more religious school of thought accentuates myth's sacred, transcendental and cosmogonic qualities; Mircea Eliade, for instance, claimed myth to be the narration of a sacred history: "Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of 'beginnings'."[59]

The modern interest in myth was either originated, developed or

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[52] See Thomas Mann; "To live is to follow preformed grooves" (free translation); quoted in Hans Wysling, *Mythos und Psychologie bei Thomas Mann* (Zürich 1969), pp. 22-23.

[53] In Brown's particular case, the strain of legend and myth goes back to the rich oral tradition of storytelling, song and poetry which has been an important part of the Scottish imagination. This tradition which has given a distinctive flavour to the Scottish novel in general and Brown's writing in particular, underpinned much of the work of the Scottish Renaissance, whose writers shared an idealism concerning the discovery of essential self in relation to history and folk mythology.

[54] See introduction to J. P. Strelka (ed.), *Literary Criticism and Myth* (London 1980).

[55] See Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (Yale University Press 1971), p. 4.

[56] See "New Directions from Old", in H. Murray (ed.), *Myth and Mythmaking* (Boston 1969), p. 117.

[57] See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton 1972), p. 19.

[58] See Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton 1971), p. 197.

[59] See Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York 1968), p. 5.

foreshadowed during the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century.[60] The romantic revival of interest in folklore, the primitive and the archaic all fed the interest in myth. Especially for the nineteenth-century artist, myth became a great source of new energy and creativity. Increasingly, towards the end of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century, it became a new way of redeeming modern man by seeking to restore him to a lost oneness with nature and by re-uniting him with his own self, or with divinity. Nietzsche's dictum that "Ohne den Mythos geht jede Kultur ihrer gesunden schöpferischen Naturkraft verlustig"[61] spurred the imagination of many twentieth-century writers and thinkers as they tried to restore a sense of self and identity to modern man by turning to ideas commonly summarised by the term "primitivism". Unlike in the romantic movement, however, the primitive was not necessarily sought in exotic continents or in "the Other", but was discovered amidst modern civilisation itself.[62] Many works of modernism employed the primitive as a means of cultural criticism and they advocated features of the primitive to alleviate the shortcomings of civilisation.[63] Brown can be seen to share this impulse and the distrust in modern civilisation. Without advocating a literal return to the life of primitive fishing- or agricultural communities, his work testifies to his feeling that something vital is lost to modern man; for him, as for D. H. Lawrence, to mention but one of the most well-known British advocates of a return to the "primitive", the recovery of wholeness and spontaneity lay in contact with primitive man and within the self. When Lawrence wrote of man's yearning for the recovery of a lost harmony in the form of a "living incarnate cosmos", he defined the mood that permeated much of European life and culture in the first third of our century.[64] Thomas Mann's position was that the highest achievement of sophisticated individuality was to recover a form of the primitive self that the race has struggled to transcend. As opposed to the moral earnestness of Lawrence, Mann, however, approached myth as a self-delighting play of ideas; and while Lawrence's view of civilisation darkened progressively, Thomas Mann's humanistic optimism persisted even despite the dark years of Fascist dictatorship reflected in *Doctor Faustus*. However, what can be seen as a legacy of the Romantic movement and what is

[60] For a comprehensive study of the rise of the modern interest in myth see the introduction to R. Feldmann and R. D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860* (London 1972).

[61] See F. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie: 1872-1874; Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* I-III (Berlin and New York 1972), I, 23: "Vorwort an Richard Wagner", p. 141.

[62] These views were propounded most influentially in the works of Nietzsche (particularly in *The Birth of Tragedy*) of which I know from personal correspondence with Brown's friend and literary executor, Archie Bevan, that Brown had "at least dipped in [it]" (Bevan).

[63] For more on this aspect see Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (London 1966), pp. 3-30.

[64] See August K. Wiedmann, *The German quest for primal origins in art, culture, and politics 1900-1933: die "Flucht in Urzustände"*. Studies in German thought and history 16 (Lewiston 1995), p. 15.

apparent in most modern writing, is that the cosmos, the universe and the "whole" began to assume magical and religious connotations. "Ganzheitsstreben", the urge to possess and embrace the whole of creation, characterised some of the deepest longings of this generation. Muir, for example, thought to rediscover a feeling of wholeness by looking back to the past and to what he called the Fable: "We can feel but we cannot see life whole until it has been placed in some kind of past where it discovers its true shape".[65] In turn, Thomas Mann proclaimed: "We are interested in the whole or we are interested in nothing."[66] In a deeper sense, this was true of German and Austrian literature in general at that time, from Hofmannsthal to Hesse and Broch. Each aimed to express some ultimate truth about life and destiny. For all of them Man's being was rooted much less in the social and more in something universal, in a cosmic order which determined Man's place in a pre-ordained hierarchy of things. To re-discover this hierarchy and universal order (Muir's Fable) was the first step towards curing society's ills. The human striving to seek and find the undetermined, the originally undivided and formless, the infinite and boundless, a wholeness found and subsequently lost, the return to "Eden" or a mystic re-union with Christ – these were ideas that sound throughout modern literature, including Muir, Mann and Brown.[67] Myth became a way of giving expression to an intuition of the eternal as well as to the essential structure that lies at the heart of human life. When commenting on Joyce's *Ulyssess* in 1923, T. S. Eliot set the tone when he advocated the "mythical method":

> In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him [...] It is simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious. [...] Instead of a narrative method we may now use the mythical method.[68]

What Yeats, Joyce or T. S. Eliot did for English literature, Thomas Mann did for German, or indeed, European literature. As Brown himself put it, T. S. Eliot was not the first one to gain effect by the juxtaposition of the antique and the modern.[69] The structure of thought behind Mann's conception of myth is complex. However,

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[65] See Edwin Muir, *The Poetic Imagination*, p. 225.

[66] See Thomas Mann, *Addresses* (Washington 1963), quoted in Wiedemann, p. 382.

[67] Michael Hollington refers to this as the "paradise-fall-return" pattern when commenting on Joyce's *Ulysses*. See "Svevo, Joyce and Modernist Time", p. 439, in M. Bradbury and M. McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London 1976), pp. 430-442. This idea has a long history and is emblematic of the hero's Homeric departure, journey or wanderings and his eventual return.

[68] See T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth", quoted in Pat Rogers (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature* (Oxford 1987), p. 425.

[69] See GMB, "Writer's Shop", in *Chapman* 16 (Summer 1976), p. 22.

one of the main ideas is based on his belief that it is archetypal by nature, representing the timeless, the typical, that which is essentially human. To live mythically means to re-live or imitate archetypal patterns. Since these patterns are eternally present, they transcend measurable time. Accordingly, the mythical, in Mann, is treated as the timeless. In his earlier fiction myth functions like a huge backdrop which serves as a point of reference and a point of departure for his stories. When used, myth makes up part of the framework of meaning. The other part is the story itself. It is the myth, the Fable, which is the underlying pattern of the story and establishes a deeper meaning. Together, myth and the story based on it, compose the whole. Not unlike Muir (and later Brown), Mann thought of himself as a re-teller of an original Fable ("Urfabel"); his aim was "die Realisierung des Mythos", to make myth and Fable perceptible in our lives.[70] His interest in the mythic and his shift from the individual to the "typical" are described thus:

> the typical is actually the mythical [...] Its penetration into the childhood of the individual soul is at the same time a penetration into the childhood of mankind, into the primitive and mythical. [...] the primitive foundations of the human soul are likewise primitive time, they are those profound time-sources where the myth has its home and shapes the primeval norms and forms of life. For the myth is the foundation of life; it is the timeless schema, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious. [...] What is gained is an insight into the higher truth depicted in the actual; a smiling knowledge of the eternal, the ever-being [...]; a knowledge of the schema in which and according to which the supposed individual lives, unaware [...] of the extent to which his life is but formula and repetition and a path marked out for him by those who trod it before him. His character is a mythical role. [71]

What Mann had in mind with his recourse to the mythical was a re-discovery of a vital universal order, so that he might re-gain a sense of identity and wholeness. The reasons for this search are described most urgently by Mann in his essay on Freud where he explains the human need to rediscover old universal constants in life:

> For man sets store by recognition, he likes to find the old in the new, the typical in the individual. From that recognition he draws a sense of the familiar in life, whereas if it painted itself as entirely new, singular in time and space, without any possibility of resting upon the known, it could only bewilder and alarm.[72]

Apart from strengthening Brown's own thoughts and perceptions of the past as well

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[70] Mann's *Death in Venice*, for instance, deals with a person's confrontation of the mythical world. Aschenbach's dream of capitulation demonstrates his subliminal submission to a mythic pattern and his immersion in timeless spaces of the past. His life proves to be a repetition of past forms of existence, relating to Socrates, St. Sebastian, the Romantic August von Platen, Gustav Mahler and Mann himself. However, the uses of myth in Mann vary from re-creating a past world, to modernising a myth or of placing mythological themes and figures at the centre of a modern story. For more on Mann's different uses of myth see Michael Palencia-Roth, *Myth and the Modern Novel* (London and New York 1987).

[71] See Thomas Mann, "Freud and the Future"(1936), in *Essays of Three Decades*, p. 422.

[72] Ibid., p. 421.

as his belief in "constants in the human situation", this must have also reminded Brown of Edwin Muir's experience of the "fall" on leaving Orkney and of his own move to Edinburgh.[73] Nevertheless, Mann's use of the "typical" – which "is actually the mythical"[74] – also appealed to Brown because he looked to myth and legend not only to (re-)construct a feeling of continuity and identity, but also because myth made it possible to re-enter or get a glimpse of the primal beginning, the "Urzustand"; accordingly, he believed that it is important "never to forget the unique place where we started."[75] Like Mann Brown was

> inclined to think that a really great story – like Tolstoy's "What Men Live By", [...] or Forster's "The Road to Colonus" – have a mingling of myth and legend in them. [*sic*] There are first rate story-tellers [...] into whose tales these elements do not enter; the tales remain, however superb the craftsmanship, unsatisfying, as if some basic hunger in our nature is not being attended to.[76]

This underlines that Brown appreciated the "mythical method" not only to gain effect, but because it was a means to approach and express higher spiritual, religious and psychological truths about human nature. In myth and legend Brown found "the oldest questions and the earliest attempts to explain in words the burden of the mystery" of life.[77] Like Mann, Brown considered myth and legend as a way of disclosing the mysteriously patterned and patterning matrix of the Fable. For this reason, the mythical journey back to the past was a further element in his overall approach to "keeping the sources pure and unchoked, and the roots healthy".[78]

Still, Mann's fascination with and his use of myth influenced Brown's novel *Beside the Ocean of Time,* which alludes to *The Magic Mountain*, in more than just the title that it shares with Mann's chapter "By the Ocean of Time". Hans Castorp's primordial experience in the chapter "Snow", for instance, finds similar expression in Brown through the eight movements of Thorfinn's journey. Particularly "The Road to Byzantium", the ancient centre of European civilisation and the source of spiritual philosophy, takes on allegorical significance. Each stage of Thorfinn's travels is not just a description of Orkney history, but finds a deeper link between Thorfinn's self and Orkney's past. Thus, his visions and dreams become an essential way to truth, knowledge and communion with the past.[79] In the same way, Hans Castorp's mythic

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[73] Brown must have commented about his feelings of unease and estrangement when he first arrived in Edinburgh, since Muir replied in a letter to him that "I felt almost the same thing about Glasgow [...] as you do about Edinburgh now." See P. H. Butter (ed.), *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, p. 190.

[74] Thomas Mann elucidates his understanding of the "typical" and the "mythical" in "Freud and the Future", p. 422.

[75] See GMB, *Letters from Hamnavoe*, 16/11/1972.

[76] See GMB, Introduction to *Witch and Other Stories* (London 1977).

[77] See GMB, *Witch and Other Stories*, "Witch", VII.

[78] Quoted in Stewart Conn, "Poets of the 60s II: GMB", p. 16.

[79] For Brown as for Mann, the idea of the dream or vision, as indeed the theme of the dreamer is an

journey back to old familiar features of life culminates in his universal dream of humanity ("Menschheitstraum"), a Jungian dream of oneness. This dream or vision is crucial since Castorp sees and remembers places he has never been to. The dream returns him spiritually to classical Greece and Sicily and suggests that what Castorp recognises springs from a deeper memory, a "great soul" ("Weltseele"), rather than from his own:

> it is not out of our single souls we dream. We dream anonymously and communally, if each after his fashion. The great soul of which we are part may dream through us, in our manner of dreaming, its own secret dreams, of its youth, its hope, its joy and peace – and blood sacrifice.[80]

In the same manner, Thorfinn re-lives in his dreams the history of his people. Later in his life as a writer he attempts to re-capture those stories but has to realise that it is only through the naive and innocent perception of the child, or indeed, the "mythic imagination", that the gates of vision can be opened and grant a perspective of the wholeness of life. Both Mann and Brown propose that the journey of their protagonists is essentially an archetypal and spiritual journey as well as a physical or real one. Thorfinn's and Castorp's activities conform in many ways to the archetypal pattern of the hero's mythic quest. This quest, culminating in Castorp's mystical union with the universal, the past and the soul of humanity, is a theme which was close to the heart of Mann and inspired Brown. In both instances, the dreamlike evocation of a mystical communion with mankind undermines the conventional notion of a single identity. Both characters find themselves part of a "great soul". This dissolving of individual personalities into mythic characters or archetypes which is basic to Brown's approach is also used to considerable effect in Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers* in which he tried to open up the mystery of personal identity, suggesting that it might become the medium for re-incarnation of the dead. The mythic thought of the protagonists as well as the cosmological patterns both imply a sense of recurrence and renewal, backing up Brown's vision of life as a sacred return of characters, events and rituals, culminating in the cycle of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ and the Christian hope for redemption.[81] Similarly in Brown's *Magnus*, the reader is given to understand that the killing of Magnus or the sacrificial

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important one. It is through dreams that significant changes in both the plot and the outer and inner development of the protagonists are brought about and that some deeper knowledge about life is gained. In this way, Castorp learns in his "dream of humanity" of the unity of all opposites. Thorfinn's school education is juxtaposed to the education and insights he receives from his visions and dreams which, as is suggested, might be at least as valuable if not more meaningful. At any rate, dreaming re-inforces the idea that there is a temporary link between the mythical and the individual life or between the collective unconscious and individual consciousness.

[80] See Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, p. 495.

[81] In a similar fashion, Brown's play *A Spell for Green Corn* consists of episodes in which the same constellations of characters recur throughout the centuries.

death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is essentially a repetition of an eternally requisite act of propitiation:

> That was the one only central sacrifice of history. I am the bread of life. All previous rituals had been a foreshadowing of this; all subsequent rituals a re-enactment.[82]

By extracting from historical facts what is typical, mythical and timeless, Brown transforms his novel, that began as a reconstruction of a past event, into a novel of contemporary relevance. A somewhat similar effect is gained by Mann in his story "Tonio Kröger", when he leads one to believe towards the end of the story that the couple dancing by, is Hans Hansen and Ingeborg Holm, two people that Tonio knew and admired when he was a teenager at dancing school. The scene demonstrates Mann's belief in the "eternal return" of universal types and situations. Eliade's idea of an eternal repetition of things or what Nietzsche called "die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen" is used to even greater effect in *Doctor Faustus* where Mann plays with the idea of Adrian Leverkühn being a returned Doctor Faustus.[83]

Brown's and Mann's ambition to dissolve the limits of time and self by superimposing modern characters on figures from the past or from ancient myths and legends (*Magnus* and *A Spell for Green Corn* for example) have many implications: one of these being the conflation of an immense time-span. The effect is to suggest that life in our time has basically the same structure as life in earlier times. In an attempt to define life in terms of the mythical and typical Mann declared:

> To live is to go along preformed grooves, it is to follow and identify with the model of an established pattern or tradition. All Life is return and repetition, and the so-called character of the individual a mythical role.[84]

This idea is explored by Brown in his poem cycle *Fishermen with Ploughs* in which he examines creatively the evolution of an Orkney community through the centuries, coming to the conclusion that:

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[82] See GMB, *Magnus*, p. 158.

[83] This is also linked to Mann's belief in the re-incarnation of the individual "I" out of the timeless and collective "I", which is further explained in *Gesammelte Werke* 11, p. 666; For Mann, the self was not "ein streng in seine zeitlich-fleischlichen Grenzen abgedichtetes Ding [...] Viele der Elemente, aus denen es sich aufbaut, gehören der Welt vor und außer ihm an." See *Gesammelte Werke, Joseph and His Brothers*, p. 134. Similarly, many of Brown's characters are re-embodiments and variations of essentially universal figures with minds that transcend their temporal limits, whether the characters are aware of it or not. This would also explain why many of his characters are not always "rounded off", (flat characters); they are defined by their function and position in and throughout time as well as their universal traits; they are figures in an essentially universal and timeless landscape: e.g. the woman, the crofter, the tinker, the fisherman, the child, the poet, the musician, the priest etc.

[84] See Thomas Mann: "Leben heißt: in Spuren gehen, Nachleben, Identifikation mit einem sichtbarlichen oder überlieferten, mythischen Vorbild. Alles Leben ist Wiederkehr und Wiederholung, und der sogenannte 'Charakter' des Individuums eine mytische Rolle"; quoted in Hans Wysling, *Mythos und Psychologie bei Thomas Mann*, pp. 22-23.

> essentially their lives were unchanged; the same people appear and reappear through many generations – the laird, the crofter-fisherman, the shepherd, the tinker, the beachcomber, and the women who watch the sea with stony patience; all are caught up in the "wheel of bread" that is at once brutal and holy.[85]

Clearly, Brown's perception of time and the past as well as his mythic imagination have much in common with Mann. His mythic and "epic" approach helps to unveil a hidden structure to human life which, though only manifest in time, is essentially timeless. Brown's work illustrates that he shared Mann's interest in disrupting the linear, the chronological in order to re-interpret the "real" and explore the human condition. By working through layers of consciousness and by analysing individual states of mind as they partake in the typical, Brown implies that the merely local and personal is only a reflection of something timeless and enduring. The apparent passage of time, with its coming and going of personalities and events, traces a pattern that serves as a source of universal reference and reinforces through its dual perspective an intuition of the typical and the eternally human – or as Mann put it – "das Immer-Menschliche".

[85] See GMB, foreword to *Fishermen with Ploughs*, p. 1.

4.1 "The Organic": the myth of wholeness and wholeness lost

Brown's approach to time, myth and legend was not made in a spirit of abstract scholarship or out of any mimetic interests. Rather, his work is the expression of his growing need to revivify the past and some of its ideas and traditions and to incorporate them as an organic part into the present scale of values. Trying to infuse modern man with a sensibility for the human race and indeed its beginnings Brown wished to offer a more wholesome and meaningful outlook on the present. A. Wiedmann pointed out that by definition, any holistic vision presupposes an organic approach to life, governed by categories metaphorically derived from living and growing things.[86] Accordingly, Brown conceives of art in agricultural terms and as something organic: "I have for my share of the earth-wisdom a patch of imagination that I must cultivate to the best of my skill."[87] Elsewhere, he writes: "We are folded all/ In a green fable/ [...] We and earth and sun and corn are one."[88] The cornstalk symbolises birth and death and life's organic oneness; conversely, Brown depicts life as a "wheel of bread". The harmonious union of the elements and beasts and plants Brown saw as a timeless token of perfection; the earth, the chthonic realm he viewed as something life-sustaining which spurred his artistic and religious vision as well as his ideas about the symbolic homecoming to an origin. Harry Levin has drawn attention to the fact that the text which the most serious and percipient of modern writers have expounded with urgency is the Gospel of St. John: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone [...] but if it die, it beareth much fruit."[89] No doubt, the themes of death and resurrection, death as the precondition of fertility and new life and the primitive rite of sacrifice for the good of the community are at the heart of modern literature and have influenced Brown deeply.

Brown was also very attentive to Mann's preoccupation with history, human nature and development in terms of an organic unity underlying the processes of history, the growth of the individual and, consequently, the creation of art. Earlier he had discovered that "deep down at the very roots and sources of life, there is an endless upsurge of health and renewal": "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things" (Hopkins). What Mann and his contemporaries discovered deep down in things was the freshness and vitality of the primitive mind, a spontaneity which could account for a oneness of thought and feeling in literature and art. This state of

[86] See A. Wiedmann, op.cit, p. 48 ff.
[87] See GMB, "The Tarn and the Rosary" in *Hawkfall* (London 1974), p. 197
[88] See GMB, "Christmas Poem", in *The Wreck of the Archangel,* p. 104.
[89] See H. Levin, p. 204.

oneness and innocent originality was to be recaptured and celebrated since:

> Art in its original "naive" manifestations was a celebration of life, of beauty, of the hero, the great deed; but now it had become "intellectual", "sentimental" in the sense Schiller used the term.[90]

Brown, who also believed in the value of a more immediate, spontaneous and unselfconscious art, the product of a time when art was still "of use", is in tune with Mann when he adds that:

> nowadays our western art is autonomous, private, a cold lonely kingdom. [...] being cut off from labours and hungers; being the preserve of sophisticated people, a small priesthood who can appreciate and understand, they alone.[91]

Both men suggest that the spontaneity of the primitive mind, the folk-mind and its art, can be more fertile and organic than the scholarly brain. Certainly for Brown folk-art represents the spirit of those forgotten rites once found in music and dance, which gave power and purpose to the lives of the ancients. He looks to those times when a rain-making ritual, for instance still involved poetry, music, dance and the arts, as well as implying a view of history, religion and primitive science. This kind of art he considered as being more organic and integral; it came from the whole man and was meant to nourish the whole man, the physical and spiritual, the thought and the feeling. Brown's belief in the organic transpires in such works as *An Orkney Tapestry* and *A Spell for Green Corn* in which he attempts to evoke that point where history and poetry meet and blend in myth, where the poem is not distinguishable from the poet, or the response to it as history. Apart from Mann's influence that of Yeats is also discernible, whose search for the spiritual origins of art and thought are symbolised in "Sailing to Byzantium". Significantly, in 1925, he asserted:

> I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificer [...] spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, [...] the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter [...]. They could [...] weave all into a vast design, the work of many that seemed the work of one, that made building, picture, pattern [...] seem but a single image; and this vision, this proclamation of their invisible master, had the Greek nobility.[92]

It is not surprising that Brown voiced his belief in the interdependent and complementary nature of everyday skill, and "high" culture which he felt had been lost in the history of western art. He valued the ability of art to be a unique image of a single interwoven identity, the product of an organic and original whole. Thus he

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[90] See Thomas Mann, *Rede und Antwort* (Berlin 1922), p. 272, quoted in R. Hinton Thomas, *Thomas Mann. The Mediation of Art* (Oxford 1963), p. 83.
[91] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 121.
[92] See W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London 1925), p. 190

claimed that "there ought to be no distinction between the craft of a good dry-stane dyker, or boat-builder, and the arts of painter, musician, poet, potter, weaver, dancer".[93] He shared Muir's thoughts on oral literature and the art of the ballads as well as the conviction that they had grown out of an entire tribe or community. Of modern European writers, Thomas Mann corroborated Brown's view of art as the expression of a whole community, which provides another reason why *The Magic Mountain* had such a profound effect on Brown. Particularly Castorp's dream of humanity, his vision of ancient Greece and Sicily as the classical origins of Western thought and art impressed Brown greatly. In his autobiography he admits: "One phrase of Thomas Mann struck me, that art is somehow 'anonymous and communal'."[94] Elsewhere when commenting on the vitality of art and its organic origins he mentions Thomas Mann and quotes from his novel:

> The art matters, not the master. [...] Thomas Mann has an arresting phrase [...] "Art should be anonymous and communal". I take this to mean that poem, song or painting, is not the work of one man labouring in isolation, but it is a whole community expressing its fears, hopes, joys – [...] The artist is merely the instrument which the tribe strikes.[95]

This also implies a Jungian view of life to which Mann was highly responsive. In fact, he built on Jung in his evocation of the early stages or the primal origins of human thought and art when presenting Castorp's vision, which is allusive to Jung's theories that the development of the individual is a re-enactment of the evolution of mankind and the history of human thought in general. Jung regarded the stage of childhood as that stage which relates best to the early stages of mankind. For him, regressions to childhood or the visions and dreams of the child were mythical identifications, a treading in footprints already made in the "childhood of mankind". Undoubtedly, Brown was familiar with this too, if only indirectly through Muir, whose poetic evocations of the communion with a mythic past of mankind through the eyes and visions of a child were attempts to gain a perspective of the primal beginning of human life. Muir held that through art and the artist's imagination, the world of reverie that links man to his primitive origin, the timeless Eden of childhood can be mediated and glimpses of this world can be gained. However a "return" seems impossible or at least lies in infinity. This vision of a completeness found and lost, the perception of life as a time of innocence followed by the "fall", as well as the life-long wish to return or find a centre that can yield meaning – these were central themes not only of Muir's but also of Mann's and Brown's work. In *Beside the Ocean of Time*, Thorfinn sets out on his visionary journey back to his origins. The

[93] See GMB, "Valid Art", in *The Scotsman*, 28/6/1994.
[94] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 38.
[95] See GMB, fragments of essays and reviews, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3116.2

"Road to Byzantium" returns him to the ancient centre of European civilisation and the source of its spiritual philosophy. This is emblematic of Brown's search for the spiritual life and the search for a centre where man, life, nature and art are one, "anonymous and communal" and meant for the "whole man". However, Brown was aware that the time of innocence, primal oneness and pure wisdom could not be recaptured "this side of time", as he suggests near the end of the novel. The adult man and poet, Thorfinn, has returned to his physical roots in Orkney and attempts to evoke the stories and visions of his childhood again; yet he has to realise that a spiritual homecoming and a return to the naiveté and spontaneity of the child's perception is impossible:

> it was all there – all but the innocent poetry of the first beginning. [...] The eye of childhood had seen it more truly [...] the glory and the dream were lost beyond recall.[96]

In spite of this disillusioning insight and the realisation that "we never find what we set our hearts on [...] we are toiling all life at the unattainable poem", Brown consoles the reader and himself with the hope for redemption and the prospect of a new child: it is Thorfinn's son who will be the poet.[97] With this vision and the theme of the loss of innocence and wholeness, Brown not only reworks Muir's conceptualisation of life as a tension between an ideal and a fallen actual; *Beside the Ocean of Time* also returns him to Thomas Mann, particularly his story "Tonio Kröger". The similarities between the two are not only those of a boy growing up to his calling of writer and poet. What is more telling is that Thorfinn, like Tonio, has to learn to accept that, while they were "in quest for the grail of poetry since childhood [...] the grail itself is never to be found this side of time." Both protagonists tried to evoke the unattainable poem, the fable; in the end, they have to be content with a "fake epic".[98]

It has been suggested that in Mann's early development, *Buddenbrooks* (1901) represents the period of naiveté and unconscious grace.[99] It would follow that "Tonio Kröger" (1903) is a lament for the loss of that innocence; the innocence and naiveté, only to be found now in the "fair-haired" and "blue-eyed", "the bright children of life, the happy, the charming and the ordinary".[100] The memory of Tonio's lost childhood innocence is most tragic on his journey across the Baltic Sea. During his crossing to Denmark he feels re-united with the sea of his childhood, to which he had addressed his very first poems, the sea symbolising the purity of his childhood

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[96] See GMB, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, p. 215.
[97] Ibid., p. 217.
[98] Ibid., pp. 213 and 216.
[99] See *GW* 8, p. 281; also H. J. Sandberg, *Thomas Mann's Schiller Studien* (Oslo 1965), p.60.
[100] See "Tonio Kröger", p. 194.

and his first poetic attempts. The journey makes him realise that the days of his childhood were happy times; back then, "his heart was alive" ("damals lebte sein Herz"). In a moment of happiness about the re-union with the sea, – the trip to the north being an attempt to return to his roots, the primitive, the vital, the innocent and naive and unselfconscious, – his

> spirits soared in an exultation that felt mighty enough to outshout the storm and the waves. Inwardly he began to sing a song of love, a paean of praise to the sea. Friend of my youth, ah wild sea weather, once more we meet, once more together... But there the poem ended. It was not a finished product, not an experience formed and shaped, recollected in tranquillity and forged into a whole. His heart was alive...[101]

Even though his trip to the north, where he spent his youth, takes him back to his point of departure and the place of his childhood, he does not belong there any more and he is virtually cast out of his Eden, "the city of his fathers" when being mistaken for a criminal adventurer who, allegedly, is trying to escape to Denmark.[102] Although Mann, through a deeper acquaintance with Nietzsche, did in fact believe in the possibility of "das Wunder der wiedergeborenen Unbefangenheit" (a return to innocence) Tonio's experience as well as *Death in Venice* and *Doctor Faustus* drastically demonstrate that a second naiveté is not to be had cheaply. For Tonio, and likewise for Thorfinn, all that remains is the hope for redemption and the wisdom of Ecclesiastes: "For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."[103] It is in this sense that we are to understand Thorfinn's final conclusion that "We ought to be glad" that we do not find the unattainable, "the grail" in this life.[104]

That the mythical imagination and indeed an identification with the primal beginnings of mankind can grant a feeling of wholeness is implied in Mann's concept of myth. However, Nietzsche's ideas about the "Wider-und Zusammenspiel von 'Appolonischem' und 'Dionysischem'" and his definition of myth as a symbol of the dionysian truth further inspired Mann.[105] According to Nietzsche there are two principles at work that account for the dynamic in life and art:

> The word "*Dionysian*" expresses: a constraint to unity, a soaring above personality, the commonplace, society, reality and above the abyss of the *ephemeral*; the passionately painful sensation of superabundance, in darker, fuller, and more fluctuating conditions; an ecstatic

[101] See Thomas Mann, *Selected Stories* (London 1990), p. 181.
[102] Ibid., pp. 165 and 177.
[103] See *Ecclesiastes* 1, 18.
[104] See GMB, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, p. 217. Interestingly, what for Brown culminates in the Christian hope of redemption and resurrection is for Mann not exhausted in the spirituality of the Christian faith, but transcends it in a striving to a new human feeling. Thus, he proclaimed in "What I believe": "I believe in the coming of a new [...] humanism. [...] This new humanity will be universal". See *Order of the Day* (London 1943), p. 165.
[105] Quoted in Helmut Koopmann (ed.), *Thomas-Mann-Handbuch* (Stuttgart 1995), p. 304.

> saying of yea to the collective character of existence, as that which remains the same, [...] throughout all change; [...] the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, and to recurrence; the feeling of unity in regard to the necessity of creating and annihilating. [...] The word "*Appolonian*" expresses: the constraint to be absolutely isolated, to the typical "individual", to everything that simplifies, distinguishes, and makes strong, salient, definite, and typical: to freedom within the law.[106]

This polarity of the dionysian and the appolonian is apparent in Brown's work too, whether he was conscious of its philosophical background or not. The life-affirming dionysian force is to be seen in Brown's treatment and exploration of ancient primitive patterns of life, kinship, birth, fertility rites and ceremonies, the necessity of procreation, participation and death, intermixed with the (appolonian) patterns man has devised throughout the ages to clothe and disguise them; in his recourse to myth and legend as life-giving patterns he relies on the dionysian principle. What critics have felt to be "a crudity of social perception"[107] or a lack of detail and compassion in his presentation of character is less a shortcoming, than "a soaring above personality", a conscious going beyond the local and the individual, an embracing of life in all its beautiful and terrible aspects. Consequently, Brown's depiction of women, in the prose finale of *Fishermen with Ploughs*, as "seed jars" is not meant to be demeaning but is to be understood as a Nietzschean affirmation of life, procreation and renewal ("an ecstatic saying of yea to the collective character of existence, as that which remains the same [...] throughout all change").[108]

The juxtaposition in art and consciousness of such concepts as Schiller's "naive" and "sentimental", Schopenhauer's "will" and "idea" or indeed Nietzsche's "dionysian" and "appolonian" recalls Hopkins' terms Inscape and Instress. Certainly it did not escape Brown's attention that the urge to unity, that which is always the same, never changing, is highly evocative of Hopkins' Inscape or what Sheila Deane has called the "enclosing line" when comparing his work to Celtic design; the more dynamic expression of each individual thing that "selves", instresses its individuality

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[106] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht*, Aph. 1050: "Mit dem Wort "dionysisch" is ausgedrückt, ein Drang zur Einheit, ein Hinausgreifen über Person, Alltag, Gesellschaft, [...]: Das leidenschaftliche-schmerzliche Überschwellen in dunklere, vollere, schwebende Zustände; ein verzücktes Jasagen zum Gesamt-Charakter des Lebens, als dem in allem Wechsel Gleichen [...]; der ewige Wille zur Zeugung, zur Fruchtbarkeit, zur Wiederkehr das Einheitsgefühl der Notwendigkeit des Schaffens und Vernichtens. [...] Mit dem Wort "appolonisch" is ausgedrückt: der Drang zum vollkommenen Für-Sich-Sein, zum typischen "Individuum", zu allem was vereinfacht, heraushebt, stark, deutlich, unzweideutig, typisch macht: die Freiheit unter dem Gesetz" (p. 791). For the English edition see *The Will to Power. An Attempted Transvaluation of All Values* 2, Book 4 (Edinburgh and London 1910), pp. 417-418.

[107] See Anne Cluysenaar, review of *Fishermen with Ploughs*, in *Stand* 13, no. 1 (1972), p. 75

[108] In Brown's play *A Spell for Green Corn* too, Storm Kolson and Sigrid are exponents of such a life-force; when Sigrid is burnt for witchery and for having made the corn grow, Storm Kolson, says: "Sigrid, if only they burn you with ceremony. The dance is everything"(p. 52).

and is yet part of the whole, corresponds to the idea of Instress, the "wandering line", "the constraint to the typical 'individual', to everything that distinguishes, and makes typical: to freedom within the law". Brown's own theories about life's recurring constants, patterns, states of mind and inscapes recall Nietzsche's philosophy of life which influenced Thomas Mann's concepts of the mythical and typical and their inherently dualistic nature. Thus, what began, for Brown, as a development of Muir's dichotomy of the Story and the Fable, was enriched later by Hopkins' theories on life and art and gradually built on other theories and ideas seminal to modern European writers, not least to Thomas Mann. Seen in this context, Brown's work shows a confluence of many developments, ideas and movements, both ancient and modern, some of which can be related to Muir, Hopkins and Mann and which are in some way or other interrelated to others such as Plato's Ideas and Jung's archetypes as well as to Schopenhauer's distinction of the world as "Wille" (will; which is time-and spaceless) and "Vorstellung" (idea; which is organised by the intellect into space and time) or Schiller's distinction between "nature" and "art", or his juxtaposition of "naive" and "sentimental" art.[109] Against this background, the ideas that further inspired Brown's work and his search for origins and the "whole" can be seen as different attributes of life and consciousness, contributing to the dynamic of being and of art. Frequently, their diverging power results in Brown's feeling of alienation, loss or fragmentation; at the same time however, they mark his search for a recovery of unity and wholeness. As a consequence, the dynamic of departures, journeys and returns, both real and symbolic, is a recurring element in Brown's work and is basic to his imagination. His work thrives on the juxtaposition of contrasts and an inherent dialectic which he recognised and explored, then wished to break down in a final attempt to achieve reconciliation and find a centre that could hold so that beginning and end might become one in the symbol of the circle: "the circle of man's life".[110]

Whole/Wholeness	Part/Fragmentation
Myth/"Mythos"	Reality/"Typus"
Dream/Vision/the Unconscious	Reality/the Conscious
Eternally human/ the non-individual/ "das Immer-Menschliche"	The Individual/"das Individuelle"

[109] "Der Weg, den die neueren Dichter gehen, ist übrigens derselbe, den der Mensch überhaupt sowohl im einzelnen als im ganzen einschlagen muss. Die Natur macht ihn mit sich eins, die Kunst trennt und entzweiet ihn, durch das Ideal kehrt er zur Einheit zurück." See Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentale Dichtung*, Sämtliche Werke, Säkular-Ausgabe 12, Philosophische Schriften, 2. Teil (Stuttgart and Berlin 1904-5), p. 189.

[110] See GMB, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, p. 81.

Fable	Story (Muir)
Will/"Wille"	Idea/"Vorstellung" (Schopenhauer)
Archetypes	Types (Jung)
Soul/Mind/metaphysical	Body/Matter/physical
Timeless/ Spaceless	Time/Space
Unity (primordial)	Diversity
Dionysian (consciousness/art; e.g. music)	Appolonian (non-musical consciousness and art) (Nietzsche/Schopenhauer)
Christ/Eden/Innocence	Man/Fallen Man/Experience
Nature/"Natur"	Art/"Kunst" (Schiller);Spirit/"Geist" (Mann)
Naive/unselfconscious	Sentimental/intellectual (Schiller)
Life	Art (Mann)
Child-artist	(Adult-) Artist
Inscape/Christ	Instress/man-made inscapes/Art (Hopkins)
Enclosing/Patterning/Unifying Stable/Gathering	Wandering/Selving/Individualistic/ Dynamic/Digressing

For Brown the development of life and art is necessarily bound up with the antagonism of these forces; yet it is in the striving for the synthesis of opposing principles that art and the word can help to impose a pattern on man's search for an ideal and offer a means of finding "a grave centre". The artist can provide glimpses into the whole as in fact the holy; although art and the word are, in essence, forms of what is lost, expressions and explorations of a lost unity, they are at the same time the locus of a spiritual return to wholeness. As Mann put it: "Art is hope. [...] She is the expression of all human hope, the image and pattern of all happily balanced humanity."[111]

Brown's play, *A Spell for Green Corn*, is an example of his search for unity and completeness and his belief in the role of art and the word in this process. Analysing the relationship between man, nature and the supernatural powers throughout the centuries, Brown starts with the presentation of an age of faith, a pre-agricultural life with "saints and fish and miracles"; he then moves on to explore the age of "witches and plough and kirk sessions" in the seventeenth century before he finally presents the twentieth century. There are two major chasms; one between "Miracle" (an ancient fishing community in the age of saints) and "Witch and Poet" (a seventeenth-century agricultural community during the Reformation); and another

[111] See Thomas Mann, "What I believe", p.166.

one between "A Red Coat for Sigrid" and "Resurrection", where he deals with "The age of machines and numbers". However, the same characters appear and re-appear throughout the play and in the final section, "Resurrection", Brown suggests that the Blind Fiddler is a survivor of a past age, Storm Kolson, and the musician of earlier ages, symbolising how art, once sacred, ceremonial and an organic part of and expression of people's life and work, becomes degraded and sterile over the centuries so that music, art, "poem, pattern, dance", as life-giving forms of ceremony and celebrations of life, as "shadows of creation", are lost. The long speech of the Blind Fiddler is a key to the understanding of the play in which Brown gathers all themes together: religion, art, fertility. Significantly, in a letter to Stewart Conn in 1967, Brown confirms that the play is a symbolic probing of the triadic pattern of "primal wholeness – wholeness lost – wholeness re-gained". Commenting on his urge for wholeness, a desire which is fundamental to all his work, Brown concludes: "in the reunion of the Blind Fiddler and Sigrid, all that has been lost in the preceding five scenes is found again, and reconciliation is complete".[112]

One particular opposition and a dialectical pattern that marked Mann's writing from the beginning also preoccupied Brown and is based on one of the more profound aesthetic speculations to be found in the history of modern thought and literature from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Rilke, Mann, Joyce and Eliot: it is the apparently irreconcilable dualism between empirical reality and a sphere of pure vision. For Brown as for Mann, the idea of the dream or vision as indeed the theme of the "dreamer" is an important one. It is through dreams that significant changes in the outer and inner development of the protagonists are frequently brought about and that some deeper knowledge about life is gained. Hans Castorp, for instance, learns in his dream of the unity of all opposites, and Thorfinn's school education is juxtaposed to the education and insights he receives from his visions and dreams of the islands' mythic past, which, as is suggested, might be as least as valuable if not more meaningful than sophisticated knowledge and learned facts. Above all, dreaming reinforces the idea that there is a temporary link between the mythical and the individual life or between the collective unconscious and individual consciousness. For many writers, this opposition between reality and (dream-) vision implied an opposition between ordinary life and art. Mann is certainly one of the most well-known modern European writers to re-address the problematic relationship of the artist to reality and the dialectical pattern of "Künstler" versus "Bürger", the artist being in isolation from the world where the denial of his life as a person is accepted as the price for artistic or poetic creation. The theme of the artist as outsider and

[112] See GMB, letter to Stewart Conn, 16/7/1967, in The National Library of Scotland, Acc 48641.

social misfit bears a long history and is a common one within this dialectic; Mann produced many stories in which the wandering artist, "ein verirrter Bürger" ("a bourgeois who has taken the wrong turning") deplores his inability to enjoy the delights of the commonplace. As early as "Tonio Kröger" he was fascinated by the idea of the artist-criminal, the alliance between artistic creativity and moral derangement. Also in *Confessions of Felix Krull*, in essence the story of an artist, the fraudulent banker, while serving a prison sentence, becomes a writer.

Though Brown was not as preoccupied with the Künstler – Bürger problem as Mann, the theme of the outsider attracted him. From the start of his career he was fascinated by queer and mysterious figures; usually these are either outsiders within an established community or strangers to a close-knit island community; frequently they are threatening, even sinister, yet sometimes endowed with an intuitive talent as the girl in *Time in A Red Coat* or in "The Masked Fisherman", where the fisherman who makes the catch of his life gives his catch to a drunkard's family and is rewarded with their mockery. At last he reveals himself and brings to the people who have ridiculed him, the gift of poetry and his essential humanity.[113] Throughout Brown's work characters appear that do not, in some way or another, fit into respected or established society: be it the tinker, the beachcomber, the drunkard, the prostitute, the exile, the foreigner, the poet and artist or the day-dreaming child. In "The Poet" *(YoW)*, Brown already suggested that the artist by virtue of his spiritual and poetic task may be seen as an outsider by the ordinary folk when he takes up his social task: he is said to *invade* the fair before he returns to his true task, "interrogation of silence". In *Beside the Ocean of Time* Brown once more turned to the theme of the artist-outsider. From the outset, Thorfinn is introduced as a day-dreaming, lazy and useless boy; the impression that Thorfinn (a poet at heart) is somehow different from the rest of his community is confirmed later when he stands at a distance and watches the young island people dance and enjoy themselves:

> There [...] dancing went on all day till the sun went down. A barrel of ale was heaved down among the rocks by three young men. Thomas Kerrigan went home to fetch his fiddle. But [...] Thorfinn Ragnarson [...] stood above, among the kingcups and the thrift. The trouble was, he was shy of girls. Presently he turned and walked away across the wide beach, where the seals tumbled on and off the skerry.[114]

At the end of the book too, Thorfinn's return to the deserted island of Norday, is a move into physical isolation; at the same time, however, this could be a new beginning, both in real and spiritual terms, as Thorfinn hopes

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[113] See GMB, *The Masked Fisherman and Other Stories* (London 1989), pp. 127-136.
[114] See GMB, *Beside the Ocean of Time*, p. 151.

> it might not be too late to celebrate what was left of "the glory and the dream". He had known that the island was a desert now; but the spirit of a place is not so easily quenched. If he were to work a few barren acres, sail to the lobsters... Then – it was just possible – out of those endless immemorial arduous rituals, the dance might break.[115]

Thorfinn is but one of Brown's characters who joins the long line of Mann's troubled artists. He starts out as the boy-poet, then becomes a proper and respected writer of historical romances, moving among the more sophisticated and cultured artists, only to find out that such a life is "a kind of treadmill existence",[116] and longs to return, both physically and spiritually, to the place where he started. However, this place is either not accessible any more (innocent eye of childhood/Eden) or it has undergone drastic change (the place of his childhood is now a deserted and barren island). Thus, the voice the adult writer is trying to find by his homecoming is "a voice lost, loved, longed-for (but buried deep in childhood) in this island of the dead".[117] Although he has found his true task and "another self, a real self, a soul, that is seeking life-long for a true treasure, the grail"[118] he is denied a return to complete wholeness and is still, though in another way, an outsider: he is the exile of Brown's first volume of poems, *The Storm*, or Man in general who leaves the gates of Eden behind in his quest for knowledge, experience and self-awareness to find himself in the other world of experience, but outside the gates of the place of primal bliss, thus being by his very nature both inside and outside. The existential aspect of the outsider-theme preoccupied Brown throughout his life. It is significant that his last collection of poems symbolically completes the journey that began with "The Exile" and his exclusion from Eden with a return to that place. "One Star in the West" reads like a counterpart to "The Exile":

> The road winds uphill, but
> A wonder will be to sit
> On the stone at last –
> One star in the west. ("One Star in the West", *FaL*, p. 85)[119]

Another of Brown's stories, "Sealskin", is also reminiscent of Mann. In the story Brown attempts to draw a portrait of the artist: "This story is really about a man and his music"[120] he says, and he goes on to describe the wanderings of famous musician Magnus Olafson through the cities of Europe, caught in the glamorous world of musicians, dancers, writers, artists and art lovers; eventually, he returns to Norday,

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[115] Ibid., p. 216.
[116] Ibid., pp. 213-214.
[117] Ibid., p. 212.
[118] Ibid., p. 130.
[119] See "The Exile": "The frontiers sealed;/ His foot on the stone;/ And low in the East/ The gash of dawn" In *Selected Poems*, p. 4.
[120] See GMB, "Sealskin", *Hawkfall*, p. 131.

his island home. However, he feels estranged from the world of the ordinary islander and is not able to participate in the mourning when a boy drowns while fishing:

> He himself felt nothing – only a little irritation at the sloppiness of their mourning. He stood utterly outside this festival of grief. He shook hands with the boy's father [...] and murmured words of sympathy; but he was quite cold and unmoved.[121]

He has lost all warmth and human tenderness in his quest for fame and success as an artist, praised by the sophisticated and intellectual world of art lovers. He realises, however, that the change is not in the islanders but in him and that his decision in favour of art inevitably made him an outsider to ordinary communal life.

> Standing on that pier, the scales fell from his eyes – the change was not in the islanders but in himself. An artist must pay dearly, in terms of human tenderness, for the fragments of beauty that lie about his workshop.[122]

And yet, he leaves the island and returns to Europe and to his "cultured friends" who think him "so gentle and sensitive". At times of depression, however, Magnus feels that this was not the life he had known as a child and

> that he was caught up in some meaningless charade in which everyone, himself included, was compelled to wear a mask. He would take part in their midnight arguments about socialism, the ballet, anthropology, psychology, and he would put forward [...] a well-ordered logical argument. But deep down he was untouched. It was all a game, to keep sharp the wits of people who had not to contend with the primitive terrors of sea and land.[123]

Remembering the words of his painter-friend – a figure that recalls Tonio's painter-friend Lisaveta Ivanovna who puts Tonio's views on art and the problem of life and art into perspective by telling him that he is "a bourgeois who has taken the wrong turning"[124] – Magnus is made to contemplate anew the use of art. It is suggested that he too has taken a wrong turning and has mistaken art for something separate from life and society: an "art for art's sake". Similar to the character Lisaveta in Mann's story Magnus' painter-friend presents a contrasting view of art:

> art was no separate sovereign mystery, with its own laws and modes and manners, answerable only to itself: "art for art's sake". "No", said this friend, "in this way art will wither from the earth." .... Art, he argued, must become once more the handmaid of religion, as it had been in Greece and in the Europe of the Middle Ages.[125]

Magnus becomes aware that art, falsely understood as something separate from ordinary human life, had "drained him of much human warmth and kindliness". The turning point in his life as an artist is his discovery of an ancient Gaelic manuscript of

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[121] Ibid., p. 134.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., pp. 135 and 136.
[124] See Thomas Mann, *Selected Stories*, p. 167.
[125] See "Sealskin", p. 136.

an old Irish sermon which changes his whole outlook on life and the use of art:

> He who had never shed a tear for the vanishing of his mother or the death of his father felt a swelling in his throat as he read. [...] The homily [...] seemed to treat of the question that had troubled him all that winter. [...] Was this then the task of the artist: to keep in repair the sacred web of creation [...] in the name of humanity [...]? If so, what had been taken from him was a necessary sacrifice.[126]

The similarities between Tonio's and Magnus' development as artists are striking. Magnus' concern for the human, for ordinary humanity and the "sacred web of creation" eventually transforms him into a "real" artist whose art shall not be cut off from labours and hungers, a "preserve of sophisticated people", but a celebration of life. This conforms to Tonio's, the artist-writer's experience, since he too has revised his view of art and the artist and learned to appreciate that

> if there is anything that can turn a *littérateur* into a true writer, then it is this [...] love of mine for the human and the living and the ordinary. It is the source of all warmth, of all kind-heartedness and of all humour.[127]

And, being completely in the spirit of Brown, Tonio speaks for Magnus Olafson, the artist who has taken a wrong turning but has found a way to redeem his art, when he realises that: "What I have achieved so far is nothing, not much, as good as nothing. I shall improve on it, [...] – this I promise you."[128]

[126] Ibid., pp. 137 and 139.
[127] See Thomas Mann, *Selected Stories,* p. 194.
[128] Ibid., p. 194.

5. The Art of Narrative: style, pattern and music in Thomas Mann

Mann's writing tends to be complex rather than bare or austere, abounding in detailed descriptions of people, places and moods, and Brown delighted in Mann's psychological penetration of situation and character, his verbal playfulness, irony and sometimes cold, detached, abstract and intellectual manner. Given Brown's enthusiasm for the pure art of the sagas this may seem odd. However, Mann's narrative art confirmed for Brown in a contemporary mode what he had gathered already from Jewish and the Scottish and Norse story-tellers: "That the work of literature has a pure simple outline, no matter what complexities, nuances, conflicts, contradictions, dialectics, clash and intermesh within it".[129] This further explains why Brown, when commenting on a complex novel such as *The Magic Mountain,* describes the book as the "perfectly straightforward account of seven years spent by a young German in the International Sanatorium at Davos in Switzerland."[130]

Brown also enjoyed Mann's habit of breaking up the narrative flow in order to add some authorial comment. Reviewing John Updike's *Facing Nature*, Brown was reminded of Mann's use of a well-known narrative technique:

> The novelist Thomas Mann would sometimes break up his narrative with the same kind of half-grave half-jocund speculation on natural processes, to the delight of some readers – like me – and the exasperation of others.[131]

In his own writing Brown explored this method of breaking up the flow of the narrative in order to reflect on the narration or a particular phenomenon. In the chapter "River" of his novel *Time in a Red Coat* (1984) the story-teller speculates about the metaphorical use of the word "river" in a Mann-like manner:

> It is a worn metaphor, surely, that sees life as a river issuing from high mountain snows, with cataracts and torrents, down to a fertile plain and then, with many windings and turnings, finding its way to the vastness of the sea. And yet, when it was new-minted, the metaphor must have seemed beautiful and true. Doesn't life begin with the high snow-bright innocence of childhood; [...] until at last it empties itself into the bitter immensity of death, the ocean of the end? And by extension of the metaphor, the river is not a figure for the life of a single individual, but the life of the whole tribe, the whole nation, the totality of the human race, and indeed of all creation.[132]

Later, he moves from authorial comments back to the telling of the actual story that re-claims his and the reader's attention:

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[129] See GMB, draft for a Moray House talk to 6th formers in 1973, in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1957/3.
[130] See GMB, letter to E. W. Marwick (undated, most certainly 1947), in Kirkwall Archive, D 31/30/4.
[131] See GMB, review of J. Updike's *Facing Nature*, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS (22/1/1986), 2845.1.
[132] See GMB, *Time in A Red Coat* (London 1984), p. 31.

> It would be tedious to follow the river any further, though in the course of this tale – which is like a river too – we will have to go downstream a little. Here we must pause; a girl is in a ferryboat, and the ferryman is sculling the girl across from bank to bank.[133]

However, Mann went much further in his use of this technique than Brown; in *Doctor Faustus* (his attempt to actually "compose music"), he explored the effects of such authorial intrusions.[134] Based on Schönberg's principle of twelve-tone music and on Adorno's *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, Mann aimed at an interrelation of time and music. Drawing on the polyphonic orchestration of voices characteristic of twelve-tone-music, Mann aimed to produce a similar contrapuntal effect by juxtaposing different levels of time in his novel. By recourse to such devices as the interposition of the narrator he found a way to tell the story on a dual level of time and thus to weave together the events that affect and move the fictitious writer while he is telling his story, with those about which he writes.[135] By combining and blending two levels of time, the author creates a simultaneous sounding of two voices and narratives, thereby evoking a musical, contrapuntal structure. In a similar manner, Brown achieves a musical and polyphonic effect in his poems and stories when he presents an event or a situation from the point of view of different people or when he employs a temporal rearrangement and displacement of similar things, events, ideas and perspectives (reminiscent of a canon). *Beside the Ocean of Time* is an example of Brown's structural welding together and juxtaposing of different levels of time (time of the story about Thorfinn and the "dream-time"[136]), thus establishing a timeless feeling altogether.

Clearly, Brown liked Mann's use of narrative style and voice; and he was even more fascinated with the way Mann structured and shaped his stories and novels. He admired the different ways in which the novelists and story-tellers, E. M. Forster and Thomas Mann, constructed their stories. The work of these two novelists,

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[133] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[134] Referring to his plans for *Doctor Faustus* Mann wrote in *Genesis of a Novel* that he felt clearly that the book itself would have to become the thing it dealt with: namely "constructivist music". See *Genesis of a Novel*, pp. 54-55. On "konstruktive Musik" see also "Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus", in *Gesammelte Werke* 11, p. 187.

[135] "Was ich durch die Einschaltung des narrators gewann, war aber vor allem die Möglichkeit, die Erzählung auf doppelter Zeitebene spielen zu lassen und die Erlebnisse, welche den Schreibenden erschüttern, während er schreibt, poliphon mit denen zu verschränken, von denen er berichtet." See Thomas Mann, "Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus", in *Gesammelte Werke* 11, p. 164. See also *The Genesis of a Novel* (London 1961), p. 29.

[136] That Brown tried to approximate the two can be seen in the following passage of "Broch": "The boy poet made a song about the islands in the Western Ocean. After a few peaceful years, the tower began to be neglected somewhat. A winter tempest dislodged one of the high stones. It lay were it had fallen, on the shore, until at last the waves ground it to sand. (dream-time) / [...] A stone had fallen from the truncated broch. It trundled on to the rocks below. Was it that stone that woke Thorfinn, or Mr. Simon's voice? [...]" (story-time); See *BOT*, p. 89.

as well as the Ballads, the Icelandic Sagas and the stories of the Old Testament confirmed for Brown "that a well-told story is conceived in simplicity and grows surrounded by silences".[137] Moreover, Brown voiced his full approval of Mann's claim regarding narrative and its yearning towards the condition of music – a variant of Walter Pater's famous dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music":

> One day in the Hamnavoe bookshop, starved for a book, I bought the Everyman selection of Thomas Mann without much prospect of pleasure. A spell was cast immediately. This was how narrative ought to be constructed, yearning "towards the condition of music" [...] Earlier I had read *A Passage to India* and *Howard's End* by E. M. Forster. These novels, in another way, looked towards musical forms to contain images and events and characters of fiction. I have tried to be true always to the spirit of those two master story-tellers. [138]

When Brown voiced his approval of Mann's claim that a narrative should be yearning towards the musical he was certainly aware of the tradition that has its more modern roots in the works of critic and philosopher Walter Pater. For Pater, music was the typically perfect art:

> If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art. [139]

Music, so Pater claimed, is pure unity of form and substance, a totality. The impression music creates cannot be explained in words, thus, it is a medium able to evoke something divine, metaphysical and timeless.[140]

After literature it was music which lay closest to Mann's sensibility and he admitted that

> I owe a great deal to music, have learned much from it, and at an early stage have instinctively practised the art of translating the technique of musical composition into the literary.[141]

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[137] See GMB, "Writer's Shop", in *Chapman* 16, p. 22.

[138] See GMB, "The 7 Ages of Man", in *The Scotsman,* 30/6/1986.

[139] See Walter Pater, "Style", in *Appreciations. With an essay on style* (London 1913), pp. 37-38.

[140] The impact of music on literature in general is deeply rooted. During the romantic period the musician and musical subjects were adopted as literary motifs, but also the sensuous material of music and the tonal properties of sounds, syllables, words and phrases as well as the rhythmic properties of word-clusters came to be appreciated more and more as essential musical phenomena. What the romantics had started, or re-discovered was taken on by subsequent movements and is discernible in modernist works, not least in those of Joyce and Mann: it is the tendency to approximate the indefiniteness of music, its spiritual and emotional impression as well as its structural and formative properties in literature. Music is a medium that involves the literal passage of time for its expression, yet the fleeting moment of its presence in the ear is meaningless without the ideal totality, or spatial form in the mind. There, music brings into focus the interrelation of the temporal and the spatial modalities of form.

[141] Quoted in H. Fähnrich, *Thomas Manns episches Musizieren in Sinne Richard Wagners* (Frankfurt a. Main 1986), p. 443.

From Hanno Buddenbrook onwards, music and musicians featured prominently in his work. Like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche before him, Mann subscribed to the view that music is the supreme mode of artistic expression, a form of knowledge too profound for revelation through mere words. On various occasions he even called his art "Musizieren", ("making music") and he referred to his works as music or musical scores.[142] His creative works abound in musical motifs and allusions which he uses to express himself on various aspects of the subject. Not only does his writing prominently feature the figure of the composer or musician (e.g. Leverkühn in *Doctor Faustus*), but it also imports musical structures and motifs. Moreover, Mann believed that the abstraction inherent in music, or in words used as though they were musical elements, can open up a reality which transcends the present one. Accordingly, his desire to deal with the condition of time and timelessness led him to consider the similarities between narrative and music in the opening of "By the Ocean of Time" (*The Magic Mountain*) – a passage that must have delighted Brown:

> narrative resembles music in this, that it *fills up* the time. It "fills it in" and "breaks it up", so that "there's something to it", "something going on." [...] Time is the medium of narration, as it is the medium of life. Both are inextricably bound up with it. [...] Similarly, time is the medium of music; music divides, measures, articulates time, and can shorten it, yet enhance its value, both at once. Thus music and narration are alike, in that they can only present themselves as a flowing, as a succession in time, as one thing after another; and both differ from the plastic arts, which are complete in the present [...] whereas narration – like music – even if it should try to be completely present at any given moment, would need time to do it in.[143]

Mann's attempt to create an intuition of the mythic and timeless within was another reason that led him to exploit musical forms. After Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche, Thomas Mann was to be the spiritual godfather to weld the preoccupation with music and Pater's dictum into a metaphysical and critical whole and enrich his narrative structures with musical elements. Inspired by Wagner, Mann believed that music had essentially the same qualities as myth; he aimed to exploit music to evoke and express mythological as well as psychological ideas.[144]

That Brown thought highly of Mann's structural and thematic use of music and the musician is not surprising. Given his passion for the sagas and the old Scots

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[142] See T. Mann, *GW* 11, pp. 714-716. About *The Magic Mountain*, Mann said that he always thought of it as a symphony: "Der Roman war mir immer eine Symphonie, ein Werk der Kontrapunktik, ein Themengewebe, worin die Ideen die Rolle musikalischer Motive spielen" (*GW* 11, p. 611).

[143] See Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, p. 541.

[144] Mann's preoccupation with music and his debt to it are common knowledge and need not be analysed here.
For further study there are countless works on Mann and music as for instance A. Schlee, *Wandlungen musikalischer Strukturen im Werke Thomas Manns. Vom Leitmotiv zur Zwölftonreihe* (Frankfurt a. Main 1981); Hermann Fähnrich, *Thomas Manns episches Musizieren im Sinne Richard Wagners* (Frankfurt a. Main 1986); V. Zmegac, *Die Musik im Schaffen Thomas Manns* (Zagreb 1959); et al.

ballads as well as the bardic quality of so much of his own writing, it is no cause for wonder that he voiced his approval of Mann's claim regarding narrative and its yearning towards the musical. In fact, one does not have to dip very deeply into Brown's work to recognise how music and dance are constantly evoked and deployed as metaphors for life itself:

> Because his dance was gathered now
> And parish feet
> Went blundering their separate roads
> After the plough
> And after net and peats and harvest loads,
> Yet from the cradle
> Their fated steps with a fixed passion beat,
> Tammas brought his Spanish fiddle. ("The Funeral of...", *YoW*, pp. 9-10)

Or in the closing lines of "The five voyages of Arnor":

> I have said to Erling Saltfingers, *Drop my harp*
> *Through a green wave, off Yesnaby,*
> *Next time you row to the lobsters.* ("The five voyages of Arnor", *SP*, p. 36)

Or from the closing lines of "Old Man":

> *Come, dancer, go*
> *Step by circle,*
> *The reel endures.* ("Old Man", *FwP*, p. 66)

Brown was a great lover of classical music. His autobiography describes his excitement at being introduced to the wonders of Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven. Even though he held that he did not know much about music, and "probably was not familiar with the more abstruse elements of musical theory beyond sonata form"[145], music does feature in Brown's work and innermost thought. Admittedly, compared to Mann's more elaborate employment of musical structures and formal techniques as well as his application of the musical leitmotif, Brown's structural use of music is far less pronounced. However, he frequently suggests that music, and especially the fiddle representing folk art, can act as a purifier. Further, the fiddle is considered to be "a very useful instrument, more useful than the plough or any net that sieved the sea".[146] Of course Brown knows that "poetry and music don't feed people, don't help corn grow or lure fish into nets, but [...] man is one and [...] you can't divide body and mind and spirit in him – The hunger in any part is a hunger of the whole man".[147] When, in "A Storyteller", the fiddle is smashed to

[145] See personal correspondence with Brown's friend and literary executor Archie Bevan.
[146] See GMB, "The Storyteller", in *A Time to Keep*, p. 91.
[147] See GMB, letter to Stewart Conn, 16/7/1967, in The National Library of Scotland.

pieces, "they broke a way of life that had gone on for centuries".[148] The traditional tunes die and with the accordion arrive new ballads from the music halls of London. With this act of destruction a symbol of all folk art and the people's expression of life in tune with the elements was gone. The fiddle as a symbol of a wholesome and harmonious way of life recurs as a leitmotif throughout Brown's work. In "The Bright Spade", Brown also uses the motif of the fiddle to suggest the decay of an old way of life and the radical change of social and communal values with the arrival of progress; the fiddle "once a sweet brimming shell, hung at Jacob's door like a shrivelled chrysalis".[149] In *An Orkney Tapestry* a part of Rackwick dies when "a gramophone with a horn came to the valley, and the fiddle hung at the wall like a dry chrysalis".[150] Brown appreciates that music and dance were once part of primitive life and religion and reflected the cycles and the dynamic of the natural world; he values their ceremonial and ritualistic origins:

> The Johnsmas Fire would ensure fertility to the whole community that year. At the fire on the hilltop [...] the young men and women danced among flames till morning. They had a part in this rite of fertility. What is the dance but a stylised masque of coupling?

He adds that the dance as a "dance of harvesters" has to go on:

> in all these primitive rites, music and the dance have an important place. [...] Music, dancing, poetry were too deeply woven into the nature of country people to be easily eradicated. They saw the dance as the essence of all their labour; all their goings and comings with plough and sickle and quern-stone were gathered into the fiddler's reel.[151]

Apart from a few others, such as the harp and the fiddle, it is the dance that is one of Brown's favourite symbols of life, frequently taking on the function of leitmotif in his work. Elsewhere, he explains the importance of the dance thus:

> The dance is a rising and falling of feet like unto your labour, a good circling, and from this pure source, the Dance (that was in the beginning with God), issue all the slow laborious necessary diurnal rounds whereby men earn their bread. The dance is but a quintessence of all our work. [...] Dance was their difficult labour turned into a gay ritual. Bread and ale were the fruits of their labour. There was a connection, therefore, between music and bread. [...] The rhythms of art were closely related to the seasonal rhythms, to a dark potent chthonic energy that raised cornstalks and rose from their roots underground.[152]

In *A Spell for Green Corn* Brown presents his version of the evolution and purpose of art and the artist and the origins of music and dance.

Mann regarded music as something divine in character and he portrays music from a more ironical and at times scientific and theoretical stance. Frequently too

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[148] See GMB, "The Storyteller", in *A Time to Keep*, p. 94.
[149] See GMB, "The Bright Spade", in *A Time to Keep*, p. 133.
[150] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 50.
[151] Ibid., p. 121.
[152] Ibid., pp. 122-3.

music is identified with evil or demonic powers.[153] In *The Magic Mountain* Mann reveals the nature of romantic music as the luring of death; elsewhere, musical tendencies are described as symptoms of some illness. Brown however celebrated the more religious and wholesome aspects of music; music resembles something sacred and is treated as a medium that opens up new worlds of knowledge as it enables people to arrive at some sort of "knowing through feeling". In "The Eye of the Hurricane", he works on two levels, contrasting and blending storytelling proper and letting musical associations evoke the story; the deeper meaning of the story being hinted at by the effects and reverberations suggested by music. Music is employed to summon up images, emotions and memories that were touched upon earlier in the story; it is brought into play to describe the intensities of life and love, since "Love is too deep a subject for prose". The love affairs of Captain Stevens and Elisabeth, Rognvald and Ermengarde, Barclay and Sandra are variations of a pattern that can be symbolised and approached more easily by music. As a realm of pure ideas and emotions, music is used to express and unite all the complexities of life; in his description of musical sounds Brown weaves all the themes and echoes of the story together. Correspondingly, Barclay, the writer who resembles Brown in many ways, has the highest insights when listening to music:

> Alone in the empty house that night, I turned the knob of the radio through sudden frenzies of jazz, staccato morse, a welter of foreign voices, till it came to rest in a temple of *solemn sound*. It was the last movement of a quartet – possibly Beethoven, I know little about music. The viola, a sybil, surged with deep subtle questionings, and the violins, *innocent* creatures of April, were pierced with the pain and loveliness of desire, and the cello said over and over again, Lamb of God, Have mercy on us, Grant us Peace. The pang of the violins was taken by the viola and turned into wise sad proverbs*: Beauty passes, Joy is a dream, Love uncertain*. The cello reassured, *Have no fear, Apple and dove, Thy Kingdom come*. The violins trysted and parted and came together again, young tormented lovers. No, said the viola, Misery is everywhere, Love is a shadow, Make your hearts marble. And the cello seemed to contradict its former piety with a long sorrowful utterance, Death is sure, dust unto dust, All is vanity. There was brief silence. Then all the instruments consented in a final dance, Love, Wisdom and Holiness crowned one another with garlands, the violins fled away. The viola covered their going with wise greenery. The cello, alone on the steps of the temple, brimmed with benediction: God is good, all is well, Rest in peace.[154]

Here music reveals more than the words of the story-teller could. It unifies the chaos of loss, suffering, heartbreak and puts them in a true order, "simplified and reconciled in a wheel of being whose centre is Incarnation".[155]

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[153] Ute Jung has pointed out that "Im dichterischen Gesamtwerk findet sich nur eine völlig ungetrübte Äußerung über den segenspendenden Charakter der Musik." See *Die Musikphilosophie Thomas Manns* (Köln 1969), p. 3.

[154] See GMB, "The Eye of the Hurricane", in *A Time to Keep*, pp. 179-180.

[155] Ibid., p. 181.

5. 1 Narrative structure and the use of the leitmotif

Most notable however is Mann's creative homage to Wagner, paid by applying (what he understood to be Wagner's) musical techniques to literary construction, principally that of the leitmotif. One of Mann's most pregnant and pointed statements about his use of the Wagnerian idea of leitmotif is the following made about "Tonio Kröger" and *The Magic Mountain*:

> Here probably I first learned to employ music as a shaping influence in my art. The conception of epic prose-composition as a weaving of themes, as a musical complex of associations, I later on largely employed in *The Magic Mountain*. Only that there the verbal leitmotif is no longer, as in *Buddenbrooks*, employed in the representation of form alone, but has taken on a less mechanical, more musical character, and endeavors to mirror the emotion and the idea.[156]

Frequently, the linguistic leitmotif consists of the repetition and variation of words and phrases; increasingly however, Mann elevated the leitmotif to the "realm of ideas and emotions" so that its use involved a more complex and more psychological method of thematic recurrence (or echoing) and anticipation as well as the foreshadowing and recalling of ideas and emotions. Mann used the leitmotif to contain and refer to people, ideas and feelings, transforming his narrative into a musical structure that was based on a main theme and a complex web of variations of the basic theme and idea. Structurally employed, leitmotifs can serve as symbols that involve change and development and invite intellectual as well as emotional understanding in the reader. In this way, Mann's narrative resembles music; it suggests an orchestra of words, phrases, ideas and themes, all held in a harmonic tension by the use of motifs and leitmotifs. No matter how many different themes appear and re-appear throughout the narrative, the overall structure and idea was never meant to be obscured. This is clarified in his introduction to *The Magic Mountain* where he explains that his use of the leitmotif served the purpose of creating a sense of unity and harmony and to make the whole ever-present by evoking or working with partial manifestations and variations of it. The emphasis on details and on varying motifs constantly recalls the main theme and, no matter how intricate the web of variations and leitmotifs, they always remain a "Variation des Gleichen", not unlike Life, which also has its leitmotifs that help to create unity and a sense of belonging:

> Life's story as a whole has its leitmotifs that serve the purpose of creating unity, of rendering it perceptible and revealing the presence of the whole in the individual part.[157]

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[156] See Thomas Mann, "Lebensabriß" (1930), in *Gesammelte Werke* 11, p. 116.

[157] See Thomas Mann, "Einführung in den *Zauberberg*", in *Gesammelte Werke* 11: "So hat auch das Lebenswerk als Ganzes seine Leitmotive, die dem Versuche dienen, Einheit zu schaffen, Einheit fühlbar zu machen und das Ganze im Einzelwerk gegenwärtig zu halten"(p. 603).

Accordingly, the artistic leitmotif always conjures up the whole; in this way a story is elevated from the profane into something symbolic, ritualistic and sacred, as Mann further explains in a comment on *The Magic Mountain*:

> Any art that uses symbolic formulae (for the leitmotif is a formula, indeed it is a monstrance that aspires to quasi-religious authority) is bound to evoke the ecclesiastical ceremonial.[158]

Mann used the leitmotif to establish a relation between the different parts of the narrative as well as to secure a deeper link between the parts and the whole. Because of its very nature of pointing backward and forward in time and space and to induce ideas and feelings, by awakening ideas and memories ("Ahnung und Erinnerung") in the reader, it produces a feeling of the whole, doing away with the limits of time or space.[159] The art of transcending time and history and of de-personalising characters, presenting them as mythical or even sacred archetypes, likens the artist to a priest; he divests the story or the epic of the profane and elevates it to something sacred.[160]

It follows that Brown's comment on Mann's narrative art as "yearning towards the condition of music" has to be understood against the background of Mann's belief in music as rendering some sacred and metaphysical symbolism, as well as his use of musical forms and in particular his use of the leitmotif as a crucial thematic and structural element. It can safely be assumed that this is what Brown meant when he said that Mann's art "looked towards musical forms to contain images and events and characters of fiction". At any rate, Brown's interest in the musical properties of literature and its inherent symbolism would further explain why he always tried to be true to the spirit of the master story-teller Thomas Mann.

Despite all similarities, there are of course differences between Brown and Mann. One of these concerns their interest in metaphysical and religious matters. Thomas Mann was an abstract and intellectual writer whereas for Brown modern philosophy was not central to his life, vision or art, even though his work touches on many contemporary philosophical and religious questions. Although he had at least "dipped into Nietzsche" (A. Bevan), the presence on his shelves of Plato, Pascal,

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[158] See Thomas Mann, "Leiden und Grösse Richard Wagners", in *Gesammelte Werke* 9: "Eine Kunst des symbolischen Formelwesens (denn das Leitmotiv ist eine Formel – mehr noch, es ist eine Monstranz, es nimmt fast schon religiöse Autorität in Anspruch) führt mit Notwendigkeit ins zelebrierend kirchliche zurück" (p. 366).

[159] Mann elucidates this in *Gesammelte Werke* 11, where he explains that *The Magic Mountain*, a book about time, has "selbst und auf eigene Hand sich an der Aufhebung der Zeit versucht, nämlich durch das Leitmotiv, die vor- und zurückdeutende magische Formel, die das Mittel ist seiner inneren Gesamtheit in jedem Augenblick Präsenz zu verleihen. So hat auch das Lebenswerk als Ganzes seine Leitmotive, die dem Versuche dienen, Einheit zu schaffen" (p. 603).

[160] For Mann, the supreme example of an artist who was bound to feel like a priest in his artistic office was Richard Wagner, of whom he propounded: "Ein Künstler, der, wie Wagner, gewohnt war, mit Symbolen zu handeln und Monstranzen emporzuheben, mußte sich schließlich als Bruder des Priesters, ja selbst als Priester fühlen." See *Gesammelte Werke* 9, p. 366.

Newman and sundry Jesuit writers perhaps gives a truer indication of his "philosophical" interests. In his autobiography Brown recalls that a fascination with modern thought and ideology, as displayed by Mann, never gripped him. Primarily, he regarded himself as a poet and craftsman whose mind worked in a different way from the mind of philosopher or scientist:

> I was fortunate that I quite enjoyed studying, even such an alien subject as Moral Philosophy. One of the set books was Kant's *Groundwork to a Metaphysics of Morals*. I took one affrighted look at the first few paragraphs, and my head reeled. [...] The Scottish fascination with philosophy [...] never rubbed off on me. The minds of writers work in a different way, in pulsing controlled image sequences, which are no less strict than the workings of music or philosophy.[161]

[161] Ibid., p. 131.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Commenting on Edwin Muir's affinity with Franz Kafka and other European writers Brown made a remark that neatly encapsulates the idea underlying this study:

> Minds fructify across generations and oceans, of course, otherwise, literature and art and music would be empty interlude and ornament.[1]

With this in mind I have attempted to draw attention to the complexities behind the "making" of George Mackay Brown. I have re-addressed the question of his literary rating by challenging former approaches to his work and by contextualising it within the broader framework of twentieth-century British and European literary practices and traditions of thought. Fundamental to my approach has been the assumption that like any other writer's work, Brown's is the site of a dialogue. As cultures do not exist in themselves, in the autonomy of their own narratives, Brown's creative imagination did not develop in a vacuum. While he was cultivating his own style he responded (consciously and subconsciously) to other traditions and practices of writing. His art grew out of a dialectic, a "being between" where personal outlook, cultural and literary traditions, movements and wider currents of thought were forged into a whole. This study has uncovered some of the forces that were crucial to this process and left their mark on Brown's work. It has revealed some of the spiritual and literary parameters within which Brown moved. However, it has also been suggested that there is a fine balance in Brown between tradition and individual talent, between "making me admire and do otherwise". It is not by looking at Brown in isolation, but by putting his art in the context of other works and writers that we can appreciate his "individual talent" and assess what contribution he has made to (Scottish) literature.

My aim was not to demonstrate how Brown's identity and imagination were moulded by his native islands and his origins (as George Marshall has done for Edwin Muir in his study on Muir's Orkney background), but to investigate a number of influences that were beyond his immediate background and that have hitherto remained unnoticed. Whilst duly acknowledging the significance of Brown's Orcadian background and the importance of Scandinavian literature, this study is based on the perception that it is precisely the creative tension between Orkney (as a source of potent symbols) and other stimuli from further afield that has given his

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[1] See GMB, introduction to *Edwin Muir: Selected Prose* (London 1987), p. 5.

work its distinctive profile. Indeed, the extent of Brown's interest in and his indebtedness to other British writers as well as his way of absorbing European literature has been striking.

While Berthold Schoene's book is based on the assumption that "all of Brown's writings are marked by his search for a distinct Orkney identity and his desire to come as close as possible to an apt description of Orcadianness" – aiming to disclose how Brown's personal vision contributed to the "communal construction and maintenance of a late twentieth-century Orcadian identity" (p. 11) – this present study has taken a different approach. It has dealt with the question of what distinguishes Brown's personal vision, and how it was shaped in a dialectical tension between indigenous and other British and European influences. The main impetus behind this thesis was not to explore how Brown's work contributed to the construction or maintenance of Orcadian or Scottish identity but how different literary and extra-literary forces have inspired him and helped to focus his perception. Consequently, rather than following the question of what Brown did for Orkney and for Orcadian or Scottish literature and literary identity, I have explored what Scottish, English and European writing and writers did for Brown and how they helped to form his aesthetic and spiritual stance.

Since the process of acquiring a symbology which gave coherence to Brown's writing came – apart from his native background – through his approach to writers whose work seemed to relate his own view of the nature of art and human existence in general I have sought to elucidate the dialogue that Brown entered into at different stages of his life, thereby indicating a certain solidarity in spirit between him and other poets and writers. Accordingly, I have set his work, for contrast and comparison among the works of writers and poets who profoundly influenced him. Insofar as he was indebted to any individual poets or novelists, one would have expected the influence of his fellow-Orcadian and early mentor Edwin Muir to have been significant. Thus, after establishing the background to Brown-scholarship in chapter one, clarifying the reception of Brown in Britain as well as discussing factors that affected the evaluation of his work, I examined Brown's and Muir's personal and literary relationship, clarifying in what ways Muir was influential in Brown's work and career. Then I proceeded with an analysis of how Brown's aesthetic stance as well as his thinking about the mythic, the archetypal and the sacramental developed in reaction to two other literary figures that focused his attention from an early stage: Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Mann. The present work advances beyond earlier approaches and assumptions of influences in that it examines Brown's beliefs in terms of the ideas he shared with these writers. Besides indicating in chapter two

that Muir was seminal for Brown on a personal level, I have suggested that the similarities we find in both poets' works are proof of some pre-existing natural affinities as well as a rich friendship and Brown's lasting admiration and respect for Muir's ideas and concerns.

In chapter three I have established a case of affinity and influence between Gerard Manley Hopkins and Brown whose kinship has hitherto been greatly underestimated. Yet, there are no doubts that after Muir – who inspired Brown about the nature of poetry and the poetic imagination, and whose influence provided him with an important value system for his art, his outlook on life and the perception of the past – it was Hopkins whom Brown saw as the supreme example of a poet who embodied and put into practice what he had felt to be crucial about poetry. Hopkins stirred into life a more coherent vision that had been lying dormant in Brown; he initiated a process of poetic and spiritual growth that helped Brown to mature, to understand poetry in new ways and to see himself and his art as part of a wider heritage. Chapter three elucidates in what ways the two poets – though separated chronologically – are yet remarkably contemporaneous in their spiritual vision and their approach to poetry and the word. Hopkins provided a stimulus for Brown to look for a system that would allow him to exercise and deploy the latent power and the unused resources in the English language. Accordingly, the principal devices and figures used in his work are there for the purpose of investing poetry with pattern and ceremony and to ritualise experience. The two poets are further connected in their prophetic and bardic conception of the poetic office, their religious beliefs and the poetic techniques used. In addition, Hopkins' concepts of Inscape and Instress confirmed Brown's own thoughts about art as being a "tuning", rather than a mimetic representation of facts or surface reality. Having assimilated the aesthetic implications of Inscape Brown began to explore more deeply what interested him: "states of mind, inscapes interest me more than people or places." Since an inscaped thing and the processes of inscape and instress are not static, and because Brown had a "distrust of the real", he challenged any claim to validity of the "real" by exploring, questioning and revising the processes of knowing and perceiving the world. Consequently, many of his works have a polyphonic quality. Frequently they are fragmented into a variety of voices and perceived realities, which attests to his attempts to explore imaginatively the form that experience and the processes of perception take in the human mind, but also to remind readers of the Inscape of things and to sharpen their perceptions: "Unless you refresh the mind from time to time you cannot always remember how deep the inscape in things is."[2] Both

[2] See Gerard Manley Hopkins, in *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* p. 205.

Hopkins' and Brown's work relies on a dual mode in their approach to the "real", based on a literal and figurative truth; ideally the two inform each other (as in Muir's Story and Fable). In this way, Hopkins also reaffirmed Brown's initial ideas about the spiritual task of a poet who is a kind of priest or prophet; both poets turned to the sacramental word (which contains the two truths of the literal and the figurative) as a source of faith. Thinking of himself as "some kind of minor prophet, endowed with special perceptions: one who warns as well as celebrates", Brown placed himself and his poetic office among other upholders of civilisation, – peasant and priest:

> Poet, peasant, priest, [...]
> a seeking
> Into the lucencies of Christ. ("Twelfth Century Norse lyrics...", *SP*, p. 90)

Hopkins' sacramentalism underlined Brown's synthesising vision and it reinforced for him the need to make sense of the world as a consistent whole and to overcome a feeling of fragmentation, or Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility". In this way, Hopkins strengthened Brown's conviction that

> For an artist of whatever kind, Catholicism is a rich inexhaustible storehouse. My own writing would be much poorer, lacking those measures of symbol and image.[3]

The study of Hopkins added gravity to Brown's own thought and work and corroborated his earlier more instinctive identification with the old faith. Brown preserves and celebrates in his work the religious and spiritual values that Hopkins personified; values also that he felt were threatened by technology and totalitarianism and the abuse of progress and nuclear power. Although his search for spiritual values and for more integral ways of perception and expression had begun before he studied Hopkins' works in detail, it was Hopkins, after Muir, who made a profound impression on Brown and who reminded him of the potential and sacramental power of the word. Hopkins was a crucial stimulus for Brown to experiment with ways of expression that could bring together the mythic and the aesthetic by means of the religious and the sacramental.

At its most intense, Brown's work is a search for the numinous, an essentially religious act culminating in a sacramental vision with all that it entails. Yet, sacramentalism was not simply seen by Brown as an idea: it was an act. Accordingly, for Brown, the act of making was a sacramental act. Making and creating were regarded as being analogous to God's act of creation. Hence, he praised the brotherhood of "the makars" and turned against the modern attitude whereby literature and the arts have tended to be limited to the activity of a cultural elite.

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[3] See GMB, an autobiographical sketch, MS, in EULIB, Spec. Col., MS 3115.1.

However, although Brown was a religious poet, he was not a preacher. His end was not the salvation of souls; like other artists he sought to create beauty. Thus, his end was aesthetic. Archie Bevan shares this impression when he points out that Brown was a religious poet, but

> not merely in the sense that he wrote many poems of Christian affirmation and on religious themes particularly in celebration of the Christian year. Some of these are very fine indeed; others less so. In fact I think George was frequently at his religious best when he wasn't talking Religion at all – which was most of the time.[4]

Bevan concludes that "He was a religious poet who achieved some of his finest work in a non-religious context." Yet, a sacramental view of the world and a search for the spiritual values in life informed all of Brown's writing.

T. S. Eliot held that Christian literature ought not be something separate from the rest of literature and that a poet should not just affect a special sense (i.e. the religious or aesthetic), but his poetry ought to "affect us as entire human beings, it should affect our moral and religious existence". Brown understood that if Christian art was to be relevant today it must not be merely pious. Above all it had to be able to penetrate again the whole of knowledge and experience. Contemporary Christian literature had to take into account and address the actual dilemma of modern man: fragmentation and alienation. He realised that it was precisely to this situation that his art had to address itself if it was to be relevant and, in the deepest sense, Christian. Thus, Brown was at his best when he created what Eliot hoped for: "a literature which is unconsciously rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian"[5] and when, in his "religious" poems he presents Christian images that catch specifically human acts of love, compassion and faith, and in which one can hear the sounds from the street, from "real life".

In chapter four I have sought to elucidate Brown's affinity with Thomas Mann, an example of European writing. Brown read widely in Mann and revered him to the end of his life. Why that has attracted no attention whatsoever is remarkable. However, in the light of the apparent paucity of evidence for Mann's impact it has been particularly interesting to find that his works not only contain many situations with which Brown could readily identify, but that Brown's own thoughts often reflect those of Mann. In both his published and unpublished comments Brown leaves us in no doubt as to his enduring fascination with Mann's concerns and narrative methods. In addition to Brown's often declared respect for Muir, Hopkins and Mann, I have been able to detect further grounds for comparison; in spite of their differences, the

[4] See private correspondence with Archie Bevan, 11/7/1998.
[5] See T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature", in *Selected Prose* (London 1953), pp. 36-40.

four writers and poets display in their own ways remarkably similar cultural and spiritual phenomena. Muir travelled far back into the racial memory of the tribe where he discovered an archetypal past that he believed informed life in the present. Gerard Manley Hopkins strove for a revival of basic spiritual and religious values and the recovery of the sacramental power of the word. Thomas Mann held that man must discover and put into practice a "new humanism", which embraces both the mythic-archetypal structure of the unconscious and man's individual consciousness. Thus, what links Brown to these writers is the shared attempt to "keep the sources pure" and "to get back to the roots and sources".[6] This explains much of his spiritual and symbolical "journey back" into the past, and it illuminates his concern with the bardic, the mythical, the archetypal and the sacramental. For all four writers the dualisms inherent in life involved concepts such as the sacred and the secular, the profane and the sacramental, the worldly and the religious, the temporal and the eternal. Instead of embracing one single notion, Brown united in his vision and work the religious, the secular and the humanistic as fundamental forms of belief. Basic to his faith was his interest in individuals and their relation to society as well as a deep compassion and love – states of mind that Muir thought were attempts "to comprehend, to imagine, everything, terrible as well as pleasant".[7] Moreover, all four writers were concerned with the paradox of man's condition: they explored the ways individuals and society as a whole gain a better understanding of and a more meaningful relationship with their pasts. All four believed in related concepts concerning a polar dualism underlying all art and life; yet they also believed in a "return" or "homecoming" (understood either in religious or mythical terms) to some source or centre. I have indicated that the similarities between the approaches of the four men derive from their reaction to the English and German Romantic tradition. Besides, all four men were preoccupied not only with myth in the traditional sense (an account of fabulous events), but with a certain manner of perceiving and narrating events (what Eliot called the "mythical method"). In Hopkins, the mythical is elevated to a sacramental plane.

Brown also shared with Muir, Hopkins and Mann the ambition to return to an organic view of life and art. All of them were searching for ways to return to "wholeness" and to attain a more unified or synthesising vision. Hopkins' poetic devices for instance were meant to make his work "organic", since "what is organic is one".[8] Similarly, Muir and Mann wished to see life whole and they believed that a

[6] See GMB, *An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 23.
[7] See Edwin Muir, *Selected Letters*, 28/2/1952.
[8] See Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Rhythm and the other structural parts of Rhetoric and Verse", in *The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 241.

"return" or a "homecoming" is possible. The effect of their shared approach is that of leading their art forward by taking it back to some primal linguistic, mythical, religious and sacramental origin.

A comprehensive analysis of Brown's poetic diction and language was not possible in this study, although it would merit further examination. Equally important would be a consideration of T. S. Eliot's influence on Brown and his attempts at a sacramental repossession of nature and time, things and history. The "Four Quartets", which made a deep impact on Brown and which helped to establish and define the Christian literary revival of the post-war period, demonstrates Eliot's attempt to bring back older patterns of meaning, nature, history and the person. McKenzie Ross holds, that "Eliot as a Christian sacramentalist has, in the 'Four Quartets', overcome the fragmentation of contemporary culture by reabsorbing the natural or cosmic myth in the historical symbol."[9] Given that Brown almost knew the poem by heart, it would be worth investigating to what extent it inspired his own art, his attitudes to "the pattern" and "the dance", and how it fits into his understanding of Inscape as the dynamic underlying the poet's urge to gain a momentary vision of truth and beauty and to perceive "pattern within flux". Moreover, it remains to analyse in depth Brown's use of myth, mythopoeia, time and the past, particularly with regard to what he shared with other European writers and with the British poets of the 1940s and 1950s such as Dylan Thomas, W. H. Auden and Steven Spender, all of which Brown regarded as "major influences". Another poet whose interests overlap considerably with Brown's is David Jones, whose essays on art and sacrament, to be found in *Epoch and Artist* (1959), would have to be scrutinised. Given Brown's approval of Thomas Mann's claim regarding narrative and its "yearning towards the condition of music", the role of music and the image of the dance together with an analysis of the extent to which music is employed as an idea and a formative and structural force in Brown's work would bear close analysis.

Wherever a direct influence could not be assumed, and where the influence of Edwin Muir, Gerard Manley Hopkins or Thomas Mann could not be determined, I have pointed to the various ways in which Brown's knowledge of their writings manifests itself in his work. Regardless of the precise extent of his indebtedness to them, there is no doubt that these writers and poets did have a deep and long-lasting impact on him. But even though Brown learned from all of them, assimilating many of their ideas and concerns, he did not follow them in an act of slavish imitation. Rather, he absorbed the insights he gained and made them part of his own outlook and art.

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[9] See Malcolm McKenzie Ross, *Poetry and Dogma*, p. 250.

Finally, having explored Brown's work and having "sieve[d] through all the blots and scratchings" of his unpublished papers, essays and notes, "in order to find out the way a certain person's mind worked"[10], perhaps the poet himself should have the last word:

> There is no doubt that writers whom one enjoys so much are taken into the creative imagination and influence one's writing; though one should never be so foolish as to imitate them.[11]

[10] See GMB, "Scraps of Paper", for *Letters from Hamnavoe*, MS (August 1973), in EULIB, Spec. Col., Gen 1957/2.
[11] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, pp. 65-66.

Appendix

S. Schmid, "George Mackay Brown as European Poet?", in *Chapman* 93 (May 1999), pp. 10-17.

APPENDIX

S. Schmid, "George Mackay Brown as European Poet?", in *Chapman* 93 (May 1999), pp. 10-17.

George Mackay Brown as European Poet?

> Minds fructify across generations and oceans, of course, otherwise literature and art and music would be empty interlude and ornament. (GMB)[1]

When Ritchie Robertson called Edwin Muir a "European Poet"[2] he certainly had good grounds for doing so. Edwin Muir, who travelled extensively in Europe, was familiar with the German language. From the 1920s onwards, he worked as a translator of German and Austrian literature, and his subsequent criticism of German writing not only indicated a substantial involvement with German culture, as Howard Gaskill has pointed out in an essay on "Edwin Muir - The German Aspect", but also helped to establish him as an important mediator of German literature to the English-speaking world.[3]

To suggest that George Mackay Brown – who did not speak German, and who in fact never ventured to the Continent – could have been a "European Poet", is deliberately provocative. Such a claim might seem surprising if not far-fetched to those critics who have successfully manoeuvred Brown into a neat "compartment" of literary provincialism, not to say parochialism. However, I would like to justify my rather bold claim by specifying some of the European sources from which Brown drew his inspiration.

No doubt, Orkney and the historical, sociological, linguistic and literary background of the Islands were *the* major source of inspiration for Brown. His accounts of the Orkney people and their legendary past have come to speak for the Islands as well as for the whole of Scotland. Brown's ability to widen his vision and to invest the typically Orcadian consciousness and the often local setting with a universal relevance has been appreciated by some critics. Yet it tends to be underrated on the whole and has taken on the form of a commonplace, a formula that fails to do justice to the artfulness with which Brown achieves this.

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[1] George Mackay Brown in his introduction to *Edwin Muir: Selected Prose* (London 1987), p. 5.
[2] Ritchie Robertson, "Edwin Muir as European Poet", in C. J. M. MacLachlan and D. S. Robb (eds), *Edwin Muir. Centenary Assessments*, Association for Scottish Literary Studies (Aberdeen 1990), pp. 102-118.
[3] See Howard Gaskill, "Edwin Muir: The German Aspect", in *Lines Review* 69 (June 1979), pp. 14-20.

That recent accounts of modern British writing have had difficulty in situating Brown, or that they write him out of the literary canon, seems unsurprising if one considers that the dominance of "English" as a language, as a literature and as a political system has resulted in a marginalisation of a great deal of writing from much of the British Isles, particularly Orkney and Shetland. Berthold Schoene has rightly pointed out that for instance Cairns Craig's *History of Scottish Literature* (1987; vol. 4) mentions Brown only marginally and merely as a poet and that Brown's prose writings remain entirely undiscussed in Roderick Watson's contribution "Internationalising Scottish Literature". But to suggest that the centre-periphery-debate with regard to contemporary Scottish writing is merely a matter of Scottish versus English would be an oversimplification. Rather, I wonder whether Glasgow and Edinburgh have not become to its northern peripheries what London is to Scotland, bearing in mind that the literature of Orkney and Shetland only features marginally in the context of Scottish Literature? Whether this is a side-effect of Scottish attempts to keep up with the English neighbours and the fashionable London avant-garde, or whether this reflects a phenomenon which C. Beveridge and R. Turnbull have described as Scotland's "cultural inferiority complex"[4] – the presumption among Scottish intellectuals that all things Scottish, Gaelic or Orcadian etc. are bound to be inadequate or backward – it is not for me to judge.

On various occasions Brown's work has been labelled as being slightly "old-fashioned", "far-away and otherworldly"(*The Scotsman*, 7/9/1994) – judgements which have certainly not helped his popularity either. In *The Literature of Scotland* (1984) Roderick Watson maintains that Brown's "mythic and fatalistic habit of mind [cannot] always do justice to the tensions and complexities inherent in the contemporary world" (p. 435). Such assessments helped to reinforce the view that nowadays a writer has to revolutionise the literary scene in some ideological, stylistic or linguistic way in order to be deemed 'modern' enough for the tastes of a critical post-modern society that never tires of deconstructing itself. The question that springs to mind, however, is whether a writer's ability or his attempt to do justice to the tensions and complexities of our age is what makes his work aesthetically worthwhile.

[4] See Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull's discussion of Scottish inferiorism in *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh 1989), 4-15, quoted in B. Schoene's doctoral thesis, *The Making of Orcadia. Narrative Identity in the Prose Work of George Mackay Brown* (1995), p. 9.

As suggested earlier, Brown never claimed that his work could attend to the sceptical and dissective 21st-century-Zeitgeist in the same fashion as the mainstream of modern Scottish or British writing does. As a result, his work cannot be fitted easily into the now popular literary camps. When his novel *Beside the Ocean of Time* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1994, "gentle poet" Brown, whose nomination had come as a surprise to many, seemed to be slightly out of place amongst the likes of "gritty" writer Kelman, or Alan Hollinghurst. At least so it seemed to the reading public in England, as Douglas Gifford tellingly put it when he observed that Brown appeared to many in the south as an "unknown foreigner". Possibly, the rather muted response to Brown and the relative lack of criticism of his work can be explained by Brown's deliberate reluctance to follow literary fashion. He rather preferred to follow his own vision and his belief in the fundamentals of life. His holistic strivings have however received little sympathy from social or literary critics. The post-modern claim that wholeness can in fact be deconstructed, has been reinforced by other critics too. Of late, French post-Structuralism has strengthened this view by denouncing totality as a metaphysical mirage or a bourgeois illusion. Derrida for instance, has forcefully argued that in our effort to penetrate the endless play of detotalised realities, we encounter not "wholes", but "holes", which in turn require further explorations. Indeed, those followers of the post-modern and deconstructive view of literature will not be rewarded when dealing with the writings of George Mackay Brown. Nevertheless, the fact that Brown's work is not overtly modern or fashionable in style and outlook, still cannot be held wholly responsible for the relative absence of critical interest; neither can his holistic or essentialist view of life when we consider that Edwin Muir's or Thomas Mann's work, for instance, thrived on holistic ideas and archetypal symbolism.

Ritchie Robertson points out that Muir's distinct otherness and the fact that he could not be situated easily in the canon of British writing can only be understood by examining his indebtedness to specifically European traditions of writing in general, and of German and Austrian writing in particular. As suggested earlier, this has in Muir's case been a comparatively straightforward task. Nevertheless, although the European influences on Brown have received very little attention, if any at all[5], we know that he was

[5] Alan Bold does no more than mention the name of Thomas Mann in his book, *George Mackay Brown* (Edinburgh 1978) amongst other writers who have influenced Brown (p.12). However, nothing

familiar with the work of such leading literary figures as Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann. Mann's work, for instance, had already been translated into English from the 1920s onwards and Mann was by then well known in the English-speaking world. Edwin Muir himself, who played a significant part in Brown's personal and literary development, had written a review on Mann's *The Tales of Jacob*, the first part of his *Joseph*-tetralogy for *The Listener* on 13 June, 1934. Muir also reviewed Mann's *Lotte in Weimar* in 1940 as well as *Buddenbrooks* and *The Last years: A Memoir of My Father* by Erika Mann in 1958[6]. Muir was also familiar with other works by Mann, such as *Tonio Kröger, The Magic Mountain, Doctor Faustus* and *Death in Venice.*[7] It was in the mid-1940s that Brown was introduced to Muir's work and the work of other British and European contemporaries of Muir's. He read Muir's *The Story and the Fable* (1940) and, apart from the general strong influence the book had on his work and vision, it is unlikely that Muir's marked bias towards German literature escaped Brown as he read more widely in Muir and also studied his critical works. If we take Brown's word for it, his first experience of Mann was a piece of pure serendipity, as he suggests in his recently published autobiography.

> One afternoon, in the Stromness bookshop, I took from the shelf the Everyman edition of *Selected Stories* by Thomas Mann. I think I must have bought it because there was nothing else to read, on that particular day.[8]

Thus, to suppose any direct influence of Muir in relation to Brown and his acquaintance with Mann might be going too far. Yet it seems to be a very striking coincidence indeed that Brown should have discovered the works of Muir and Mann at about the same time.

Irrespective of how specific Muir's influence on Brown was with regard to German literature, there is no denying the fact that German literature, particularly Thomas Mann, made a deep impression on him. After having read Mann's *Selected Stories* and being highly impressed by them, he sent for *The Magic Mountain* which gave him "days of intense delight"[9]. In an interview with Bob Tait and Isobel Murray in 1984, where Brown revealed

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is said about the possible nature of such an influence or the reasons why Brown was drawn to Mann's work.

[6]Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers* (1934), *Young Joseph* (1935), *Joseph in Egypt* (1938) and *Joseph the Provider* (1944), transl. by H.T. Lowe-Porter; see also *The Listener*, 28/11/1940;

[7] Muir mentions these works in his article on *The Buddenbooks* in: P. H. Butter (ed.), *The Truth of Imagination.* Some uncollected reviews and essays by Edwin Muir (London 1987), pp.199-202; see also P. H. Butter (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Edwin Muir* (London 1974), p. 38.

[8] Quoted from GMB, *For the Islands I sing. An Autobiography* (London 1997), p. 65.

[9] Ibid.

comparatively more about his literary influences and preferences, he confirmed that his first encounter with Thomas Mann's work occured in the mid 1940s, and that he had read widely in Mann. He also liked *Doctor Faustus* immensely, and apparently read it several times. On various other occasions Brown mentioned Thomas Mann as a major influence; in one of his weekly contributions to *The Orcadian* he commented in 1979 that Mann's works belonged to those that he would never like to do without:

> All the thousand books in my house could go, without any lasting regret on my part. I would, however, insist on keeping the works of Thomas Mann, E.M. Forster [...] and Bertolt Brecht. (15/3/1979)

His admiration for Thomas Mann lasted to the end since he admitted:

> As one gets older, fewer and fewer writers have power to cast a spell. Not for years have I experienced the thrill of first opening a book by E.M. Forster, or Thomas Mann [...] Those are moments of a person's life which alter his whole outlook on human affairs. (*The Orcadian*, 21/10/1976)

Mann's *Buddenbrooks* also belonged to those works that Brown was re-reading not long before his death in April 1996.

As to the precise nature of Thomas Mann's influence, Brown was hardly ever explicit. However, we can confidently surmise that one thing Brown admired in Mann was what Harry Levine, in his critical introduction to the work of James Joyce (1944) called the "shift from the personal to the epic". The modern discovery that the ordinary can serve as the extraordinary - or to use Brown's own words, that a writer should try to "make elaborate kennings out of ordinary matters" – was certainly an idea that Brown admired in the works of such writers as Muir, Joyce and Mann. In "Die Kunst des Romans" (The art of the novel) Mann stated:

> The art (of writing) lies in making the smallest possible use of external life in order to bring about the greatest impact on the inner life [...] It is not the task of the novelist to write about great events, but to make small ones interesting [...] Making apparently intrinsically boring things interesting, that is the secret of story-telling.[10]

Brown confirmed this by saying that:

> Every man and woman, however seemingly ordinary and unimportant [...] has changed (however minutely) the history of the race. It is those 'boring' people who are the heroes of modern literature.[11]

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[10] (free translation); "Die Kunst besteht darin, daß man mit dem möglichst geringsten Aufwand von äußerem Leben das Innere in die stärkste Bewegung bringe [...] Die Aufgabe des Romanschreibers ist nicht, große Vorfälle zu erzählen, sondern kleine interessant zu machen [...] Das Geheimnis der Erzählung ist es, das was eigentlich langweilig sein müßte, interessant zu machen.", in "Die Kunst des Romans", *Gesammelte Werke X* (Berlin 1960), pp. 356-357.

[11] See "An Autobiographical Essay", in M. Lindsay (ed.), *As I remember* (London 1979) p. 9.

Although Brown's work cannot be seen as an imitation of modernism, we find that he shared many modernist concerns, as manifested in the treatment of time, the use of myth and the presentation of identity and character, to mention but a few. The phenomenon of time was of general concern to many moderns and it features most dominantly in Mann. *The Magic Mountain*, commonly regarded as the modern time-novel ("Zeitroman") *per se*, depicts how the tubercular protagonist Hans Castorp tries to come to terms with the phenomenon of time and of being "lost in time" throughout the novel. *The Magic Mountain* surely appealed to Brown at a time when he was suffering from another bout of tuberculosis himself. It may safely be assumed that Brown, who also experienced "those sombre moods that gather about a long-term patient"[12]did identify with Hans Castorp's pondering about the phenomenon of time and his feeling that time becomes the "eternal Now" ("das ewige Jetzt").

However, there are other points that elucidate how Brown responded to Thomas Mann. It is for instance quite remarkable that the title of Brown's novel *Beside the Ocean of Time* directly echoes the *The Magic Mountain*- chapter "By the Ocean of Time". This is surely significant and suggests that Mann's chapter, and the novel in general struck a powerful chord in Brown. *Beside the Ocean of Time* demonstrates in many ways that Brown assimilated Mann's writing and that he was inspired by *The Magic Mountain*. In Mann's work Brown found confirmed that a writer's task is to find ways of transcending time and transposing the myth (or Muir's *Fable*) "sub specie temporis nostri". *Beside the Ocean of Time* shows how Brown elaborates on the idea of the timeless fable that is evoked by following Thorfinn on his journeys through space and time. At the end, we return to the great ocean of life, whence we set out at the beginning. We come full circle and return to the "ocean of the end and the beginning"(p. 217). This accords with the cyclic conception of time shared by Mann and Muir. The way Thorfinn resembles Hans Castorp in his being lost in time and the past is striking. Castorp's dream-journey back to his roots in the chapter "Snow" and Thorfinn's visionary questings when being "two thousand years lost in time" (p. 77) spring, so it is suggested, from the same universal source, "the great ocean of time". This "ocean of eternity" stores many mysteries and brings many memories from man's antiquity to its shores: "There are great mysteries to be found on the shore of the great ocean of time." (p. 101) Hans Castorp's primordial

[12] See George Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry* (London 1969), p. 167.

experience in the chapter "Snow" finds similar expression in Brown by the eight movements to Thorfinn's journey. Particularly "The Road to Byzantium", the ancient centre of European civilisation and the source of spiritual philosophy takes on allegorical significance. Each stage of Thorfinn's travels is not just a description of Orkney history, but finds a deeper link between the inner Thorfinn and Orkney's past in general. Thus, his visions and dreams become the essence. Indeed, so does Hans Castorp's dream of Ancient Greece and Sicily, which is referred to as a universal "dream of humanity" ("Menschheitstraum"). In both works the dreamlike evocation of a mystical communion with mankind undermines the conventional notion of a single identity. Both characters find themselves as being part of a "great soul" and they eventually realise that

> it is not out of our single souls we dream. We dream anonymously and communally, if each after his fashion. The great soul of which we are part may dream through us, in our manner of dreaming, its own secret dreams, of its youth, its hope, its joy and peace – and its blood sacrifice.[13]

In that fashion, Thorfinn re-lives in his dreams the history of his people. Later, he attempts to recapture those stories as a writer but has to realise that it is only through the "mythic" imagination of the child that the gates of vision can be opened and grant us a perspective of the wholeness of life.

Both Mann and Brown suggest that the journey of their protagonists becomes an archetypal and spiritual journey. Thorfinn's and Castorp's activities seem to conform in many ways to the archetypal pattern of the hero's mythic search or quest. The mythic journey back to old familiar features of life which culminates in Castorp's mystical immersion in the universal is a theme which was close to the heart of Mann and obviously inspired Brown. In an essay on Freud (1936), Mann gives the reason for the human need to rediscover the old universal constants in life:

> Recognising things is important to men; they want to find again the old in the new and the typical in the individual. That is the basis of feeling at home in life; for life as something wholly new, unique and individual with no chance of finding old familiar features in it could only harm and confuse. [14]

Brown related to this well. Not only did it remind him of Edwin Muir's experience of "The Fall" on leaving Orkney, but it also brought back to him the memories of his own time in Edinburgh. Brown had commented about his feelings of unease and estrangement when he first went there, as Muir

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[13] See Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (London 1960), p. 495.

[14] See Thomas Mann, "Freud and the future", in *Essays of Three Decades* (London 1947) p. 421.

mentions in a letter to him that he felt almost the same thing about Glasgow as Brown did about Edinburgh.

However, Mann's use of the "typical" which he thought is actually the "mythical", also appealed to Brown for another reason. In his introduction to *Witch and Other Stories* (1977) he admits that he was also inclined to think that really great stories have a mingling of myth and legend in them. He thought that those tales which do not contain these elements remain, however superb the craftsmanship, unsatisfying as if some basic hunger in our nature is not being attended to.

Apart from the use of myth and the treatment of time and the past, there are further hints as to the ways Thomas Mann inspired George Mackay Brown's artistic approach and vision. Although they cannot be developed here, I would like to point out that on the whole, George Mackay Brown shared with Mann a deeply humanistic outlook and a spiritual impulse towards wholeness. At times there is even a surprising correspondence of imagery. Furthermore, Brown also voiced his full approval of Mann's claim regarding narrative and its yearning towards the condition of music – a variant of Walter Pater's famous dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music". Although Brown admitted that he did not know much about music and that he was probably unfamiliar "with the more abstruse elements of musical theory beyond sonata form" (Archie Bevan), he was a great lover of classical music. Music most certainly featured in his thought and inmost spirit, as well as in his work and it would be rewarding to assess the extent to which Mann's claim is put to use and in what ways music is employed as an idea, or is a formative and structural force in Brown's work.

Finally I would like to emphasise that I do not intend to forcefully insist on Mann's direct influence on Brown and his work. It is not the purpose of this essay to somehow upgrade Brown's writing by suggesting that he has learned from one of the most prolific 20th-century writers. Admittedly, Thomas Mann was a highly philosophical writer whereas for Brown modern philosophy was not central to his life, vision or art. Although he had at least "dipped into Nietzsche" (A. Bevan), the presence on his shelves of Plato, Pascal, Newman and sundry Jesuit writers perhaps give a truer indication of his "philosophical" interests. In his autobiography, Brown recalls that a fascination with modern philosophy, as displayed by Mann, never was to get a grip on him. Primarily, he regarded himself as a poet and

craftsman, whose mind worked in a different way from the mind of philosopher or scientist:

> I was fortunate that I quite enjoyed studying, even such an alien subject as Moral Philosophy. One of the set books was Kant's *Groundwork to a Metaphysics of Morals*. I took one affrighted look at the first few paragraphs, and my head reeled. There was not a possibility that I would ever understand such stuff. Somehow I got hold of a commentary by a Jesuit Priest, Fr. Coplestone, on Kant's book. The commentary dispelled the Germanic fogs. I enjoyed Coplestone, and so managed to answer the exam question on Kant when the time came. But now even the commentary has faded. The Scottish fascination with philosophy – Kant himself had Scottish ancestors – never rubbed off on me. [...] The fault is in myself, I have known fine minds who have been enthralled life-long by Hume, and by other philosophers, even the difficult modern ones. The minds of writers work in a different way, in pulsing controlled image sequences, which are no less strict than the workings of music or philosophy.[15]

The process of acquiring a symbology which gave coherence to Brown's writing came, apart from his Orkney background, through his approach to writers whose work seemed to relate his own view of the nature of art and of the nature of human existence in general. Even if European writing, and particularly Mann's work, might not have been the major source of inspiration for Brown, it is nevertheless significant to elucidate the ways in which he responded to and assimilated German literature.

Brown's distinct Orcadian identity and the reputation he had for being "the Orkney Bard" has often led to the belief that his writing is characterised by a certain narrowness of field. In his contribution to Norman Wilson's *Scottish Writing and Writers* (1977) Douglas Gifford, for instance, has tentatively suggested that Brown's case is the sad one of a truly great writer who has chosen to live in a room with only one view from its single window.

To indicate, therefore, that Brown looked for inspiration from beyond his native Orkney, might help open up a new dimension to his work. In any case, it could demonstrate that with regard to Brown, this room with its single window was in fact a "room with a view" – a view and a vision oriented towards other British and European trends as well as a departure point for his own way of absorbing these stimuli into his art.

> There is no doubt that writers whom one enjoys so much are taken into the creative imagination and influence one's writing. (GMB)[16]

[15] See GMB, *For the Islands I sing*, p. 131.
[16] Ibid., p. 65 ff.

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